

**POWER DYNAMICS AND SUBALTERNS’ ORGANISING IN AN INFORMAL SETTLEMENT: A PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH IN SOUTH AFRICA**

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**Abstract**

Mainstream literature of management and organisational studies (MOS) is based on underlying assumptions and constructions of ideas that have been universalised to justify specific conceptions and forms of organising. In this work, I argue that mainstream MOS has not considered the particular contexts of the marginalised organising in urban areas in the Global South, neglecting the subalterns (understood as the groups or individuals oppressed in various forms and displaced to the margins of society) and the complexities of power dynamics in the context of informal organising. This work combines alternative approaches from critical management studies, postcolonialism, decolonialism, and subaltern urban studies to tackle these gaps in knowledge. Hence, I emphasise the need to examine new and alternative ways of thinking and understanding the subalterns, their forms of participation, and the spaces they occupy in urban areas. In so doing, this thesis also acknowledges how academic production inevitably implies some forms of oppression of the subalterns, too. Arguably, the subaltern cannot be represented adequately by academic knowledge because academic knowledge is a practice that would actively produce subalternity in the very act of presenting it. And while there seems not to be a straightforward solution to this dilemma, by problematising and reflecting on my positionality as a researcher, this work aims to contribute to the debate on the representation of the subalterns in MOS.

This study specifically explores to what extent and how power dynamics affect the organising of the subalterns in an informal settlement in South Africa. Through a participatory methodological approach, it provides a space for the voices of people more usually marginalised by mainstream management and organisational studies. As examined throughout this work, this is where the methodological contribution of this research is focused, providing an insight into organising practices and narratives that tend to be ignored in mainstream western management and organisation literature. Methodologically this research also illustrates an innovative design of digital and at-distance research methods used to ensure participatory research continued during the spread of Covid-19 infection in South Africa.

The findings indicate that organisational practices of the subaltern in the Magangeni informal settlement are shaped by interrelated power dynamics to which they are exposed -their differences and heterogeneity, the neoliberal world order, and their immediate needs and the nature of the demands upon them. All these factors are shown to have been aggravated amidst the pandemic of Covid-19 and a fire incident that took place in October 2020. The national lockdown introduced in March 2020 resulted in people of the informal settlement losing their jobs, increased overcrowding and decreased access to basic services, and more cases of gender-based violence. Drawing from these findings, the thesis illustrates alternative understandings of informal organising not usually acknowledged in mainstream management and organising literature.

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*To all those voices yet to be heard…*

**List of Abbreviations**

ANC African National Congress

BNG Breaking New Ground Policy

CAQDA Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis

CBOs Community-Based Organisations

CMS Critical Management Studies

CPB Climate Protection Branch

CoI Community of Innovation

CSOs Civil Society Organisations

DA Democratic Alliance

GAs Grassroots Associations

GBV Gender-Based Violence

MBOPs Membership-Based Organisations of the Poor

MDGs Millennium Development Goals

MOS Management and Organisational Studies

NDHS National Department of Human Settlements

NGOs Non-Governmental Organisations

PAR Participatory Action Research

RDP Reconstruction and Development Programme

RRP River Rehabilitation Project

RTA Reflexive Thematic Analysis

SASSA South African Social Security Agency

SNDF South African National Defence Force

UISP Upgrading of Informal Settlement Programme

UN United Nations

UTFS South African local university

USDG Urban Sustainability Development Grant

VNPS Voluntary Non-Profit Sector

**Chapter I: Introduction**

This research specifically explores to what extent and how do power dynamics affect the organising of the subalterns in an informal settlement in South Africa. In this work, I argue that mainstream management and organisational studies (MOS) has not considered the particular contexts of the marginalised organising in urban areas in the Global South, neglecting the subalterns and the complexities of power dynamics in informality. Consequently, I emphasise the need to examine new and alternative ways of thinking and understanding the subalterns, their forms of participation, and the spaces they occupy in urban areas. In so doing, I intend to provide an insight into organising practices and narratives that are ignored in mainstream western management and organisation literature and open new spaces to those who have been made voiceless in the knowledge production of these studies in the Global South. Arguably, these findings can lead to reconceptualisations that alter understandings and enable us to see knowledge about informal organising differently.

This chapter introduces the research background (1.1), the research process and its expected contributions to knowledge (1.2), the research question and main objectives (1.3), and the structure of this thesis (1.4). In the following section, I first examine mainstream MOS literature to assess the underlying assumptions and construction of ideas that tend to underpin accepted conceptions of organising. In so doing, I reflect on the notion of ‘the other’, analysing postcolonial debates on how the colonised ‘other’ has been historically represented in asymmetrical terms with the Western self. I also highlight the relevance of moving beyond binary oppositions of ‘the other’ and the Western self. The aim is not to identify an alternative truth but to recognise the existence of a multiplicity of voices and possibilities, which might help challenge mainstream assumptions. I then provide a brief description of the administrative division of South Africa to understand two elements: the demarcation in which the informal settlement exists; and the spaces in which its dwellers are invited and expected to organise and participate.

* 1. **Research background**

*1.1.1 The Other’s representation and discourse*

Mainstream management and organisational studies (MOS) are based on a set of assumptions about the nature of organisations that tend to ignore many vital aspects of the broader social, political, and economic order (Holmes, 2016). Rather understanding of management tends to emphasise a set of skills and best practices independent of the context (Thomas, 1996). Scholars have argued that technocratic management ideas are invoked to legitimise dominant development philosophies and practices that have been universalised to guide and justify specific conceptions and forms of development (Dar and Cooke, 2013). In that sense, since its emergence in the early 1900s, MOS has predominantly relied upon a Euro-American epistemology, presenting organisational forms developed in the West as exemplars for universal development for the rest of the world to follow (Westwood et al., 2014). Accordingly, for Jack et al. (2011, p.294), MOS “remains a field of study focused on and concerned with the actions and interests of large corporations and their leaders located in the Global North. It is a field researched by members of a privileged elite from the metropolitan centre, focusing on persons, organisations and systems of organisations from the centre, for and on behalf of audiences similarly located”. Consequently, the effects of such core-periphery relations have and continue to be problematic, sometimes devastating, for many individuals and marginalised groups in peripheral locations (Westwood et al., 2014), affecting them socially, politically, and economically as further examined throughout this work.

This section draws on elements of critical management studies (CMS) and postcolonialism to challenge MOS mainstream assumptions. Drawing on CMS, this work highlights the relevance of alternative versions of reality comprised of multiple, socially constructed realities and the development of practical understandings that can counteract taken-for-granted discourses of management and organisational theory (Alvesson and Deetz, 2000; Sinha, 2018). By examining the specific practices of an informal settlement in South Africa, I intend to address the relevance of the local settings and the different processes that might emerge in community organising. Critical management exposes the frequently unnoticed practices that privilege some individuals at the expense of others, creating injustice in organisations and society at large (Voronov, 2008). Thus, taking a CMS perspective is relevant for this research because it identifies and questions conflicts of power and interest. As further developed throughout this work, also within marginalised groups, specific individuals might adopt positions of power at the expense of others.

Moreover, drawing on postcolonial perspectives and focusing on the individuals and groups whose interests are usually not attended to, Jack et al. (2011) problematise the ontological and epistemological ground upon which mainstream MOS traditionally stands. The scholars interrogate the ‘persisting parochialism’ and ‘universalistic pretensions’ of much of MOS. In that sense, MOS would suffer from three types of parochialism: contextual, qualitative, and quantitative parochialism (Boyacigiller and Adler, 1991). What is suggested through these terms is the predominance of Western interests, values, and cultural orientations in MOS. Consequently, the countries on which academics conduct their research in MOS would be limited, leaving large parts of the world unrepresented (Jack et al., 2011).

In ‘Orientalism’, one of the pioneer publications of postcolonial studies, Said (1978) addresses the representation of ‘the other’. Orientalism rests on binary oppositions in which ‘the other’ is commonly characterised as inferior to the ‘Western Self’. Politicians, economists, and several academics would have acknowledged these differences to create a predominant discourse. Said highlights the importance of this predominant discourse to “understand the enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage -and even produce- the Orient politically, sociologically… and imaginatively during the post Enlightenment period” (ibid., p.3). Jack et al. (2011) add that, through multiple discursive forms, the West and non-West have been represented in asymmetrical terms; the former considered civilised, developed, scientific; the latter uncivilised, retrograde and superstitious.

Consequently, the construction and signification of discursive forms can be thoroughly analysed through Foucault’s work. In ‘The Archaeology of Knowledge’ (1970), Foucault used the term ‘discourse’ to represent a form of organising knowledge that structured social relations through the collective understanding of a discursive logic accepted as a fact. The production of discourses would occur within particular power dynamics, which define the criteria for legitimating knowledge within the discursive order. Discourse would thus “define the boundaries for what can be thought of and communicated at a given point of time in a given society” (Baumgarten and Ullrich, 2016, p.13). Accordingly, for Raffnsøe et al. (2019), the notion of discourse would not be based on fixed structures or binary oppositions (as indicated by Said). Still, it would happen within a multiplicity of voices and force relations that are always in struggle, competing with, opposing, and resisting each other (Moosavinia et al., 2019). In that sense, any individual, independently of her constraints or situation, could learn on her own, reject elitist discourses, and break away from the logic of subordination (Rancière 2009, in Huault et al. 2014). Drawing on these debates, this thesis aims to challenge the dominant MOS discourses that have been legitimised and universalised in the West for the rest of the world to follow. Consequently, it seeks to identify and question conflicts of power and interest and challenge the persisting parochialism and universalistic pretensions of much of MOS by critically engaging with the struggles of those whose interests are usually not attended. In Chapter II, I elaborate in more detail on different understandings regarding those whose interests are usually not attended in mainstream discourses and institutions. The following subsection briefly describes the administrative division of South Africa to understand the demarcation in which the informal settlement exists and the spaces in which its dwellers are expected to organise.

*1.1.2 The South African administrative division and the ward committees*

This research takes place in Magangeni informal settlement, located in the urban core of one of the largest cities of South Africa. In this city, more than 40% of its population live in poverty; almost 30% of its inhabitants reside in informal settlements, and a third of its economically active citizens are formally unemployed hence rely on ‘informal activities’ as a source of income (Braathen et al. 2014; Sutherland et al. 2018). For administrative purposes, South Africa is divided into nine provinces. All provinces are separated into metropolitan and district municipalities, with the latter being further divided into local municipalities. My research took place within one of the largest metropolitan municipalities in the country that retained a significant ANC[[1]](#footnote-1) majority for the local government elections in 2016. Arguably, the municipality’s political alignment with the national ANC agenda of transformation and development would have allowed the municipality to receive ongoing support from the national Government (Sutherland et al., 2018). As a result, the municipality has engaged with several stakeholders in an incremental upgrading informal settlement programme providing different levels of upgrading and services to the area’s settlements (as later described in this chapter).

The South African Municipal Demarcation Board divides municipalities into smaller geopolitical subdivisions known as wards (South African Municipal Demarcation Board, 2019; South African Government, n.d.). In 1998, the “Local Government: Municipal Structure Act 117” (South African Government, 1998) established that each ward should have a ward committee. According to the Act (Part 4: Section 73), a ward committee consists of ten (non-paid) individuals, plus the councillor, who is directly elected by each ward and is also the committee’s chairperson. Each municipality was asked to consider gender parity and the representation of ‘diversity of interests in the ward’ too (South African Government, 1998). Hence, the election of the ward members should consider sectoral or geographic representation; go beyond party politics; and remain loyal to the interests of the local community (Smith and de Visser, 2009; Modise, 2017). The initiative of implementing ward committees was claimed to be unique in the world (Piper and Deacon, 2009), as it allowed the local community to participate and engage with the municipality in running their affairs. The idea followed one of the essential ideological documents of the ANC, namely the Freedom Charter of 1955 and its slogan ‘The people shall govern’ (Piper and Deacon, 1999). Most importantly, it was in line with the ‘unusual political commitment to participatory governance’[[2]](#footnote-2) of the South African Constitution of 1996 (Modise, 2017). Yet, this administrative arrangement has been contested in practice, especially regarding representativity and access to information when organising ward committees. For Smith and de Visser (2009), on the one hand, there are allegations against councillors for picking ward committee members from their same political party. On the other hand, the effective communication channels between municipalities and local communities would be quite poor. Consequently, the functioning of ward committees would highly depend on the performance of the ward councillor, the political will of the local government party, and the support of the municipality (Piper and Deacon, 2009).

In 2005, the South African Government released the Guidelines for the Establishment and Operation of Municipal Ward Committees (South African Government, 2005). The document recommended that ward committees be elected for periods between two and three years and ward meetings be held at least quarterly. It also described ward committees as an independent, impartial, and representative structure working as an ‘advisory body’ (Section 4: Status of Ward Committees). While the Guidelines section on “Function and power of ward committees” reinforced the role of the committee in making recommendations to the municipality, it explicitly mentioned that “no executive powers should be delegated to ward committee members” (South African Government, 2005, page 6). With neither influence on decision-making, nor other power than that of mere advisors, questions could arguably be raised about the practical implications regarding public participation of local communities (Piper and Deacon, 2009). As will be discussed in the literature review, there might be a need to rethink how participation is conceived in the development context. Whether local communities are seen as passive ‘beneficiaries of development’ or as ‘active creators’ included in the particular interventions could arguably make a difference (Gaventa, 2004).

Additional concerns with the implementation of ward committees relate to the formalisation of participation. Most municipalities in South Africa now rely on ward committees as the only legitimate channel for engaging community members, to the detriment of other instances through which citizens would prefer to participate on their terms (Smith and de Visser, 2009). Consequently, it has been suggested that one of the explanations for the outbreak of community protests experienced in South Africa over the last few years lies in the fact that communities feel alienated from the formal spaces created by the government for participation (Mathekga and Buccus, 2006). Arguably, citizens would be feeling ignored by the governance system (which include ward committees), aiming for more involvement in local governance via other methods of guaranteed participation, as further examined in Chapter V.

**1.2 Research process and contributions to knowledge**

*1.2.1 The research origins*

In 2012, I volunteered to work in an international NGO in an informal settlement in South Africa. After one year, I quit the job because of disagreements in what I considered a patriarchal and top-down approach in the NGO’s intervention. Yet I decided to stay in the informal settlement and create new projects in the area. My idea was to design them from a bottom-up approach, with the community and for the community. Eventually, in 2013, and after several participatory assemblies, we founded an NGO to respond to the needs the community itself had identified. Five years later, I was offered the chance to apply for a PhD. With an academic background in international development and public policy, and practical experience in programmes and policies regarding poverty, inequality, and social exclusion, I thought this was an excellent opportunity to present a research project that could incorporate the participation of marginalised groups in South Africa.

When I began the research for this thesis, I was mostly concerned with the ways of organising of marginalised groups in informality and how we could challenge mainstream and patriarchal understandings of organising through their living experiences. Hence my first challenge was not to reproduce these patriarchal understandings when producing and interpreting the data for this research. In that sense, I was aware that it was critical to reflect on the notion of voice, and the tensions and limitations of taking over the analysis and the production of knowledge through writing and presenting an academic piece of work. Consequently, throughout my research, I aimed to engage in continuous self-reflection of how my experiences and identity could shape the research, considering both my position of power and the ways to share it.

In 2019, and during my first year of research, I presented my work at a conference in Johannesburg. On that occasion, I showed my interest in finding a grassroots organisation with which I could work during my fieldwork in the following years. When presenting, I referred to membership-based organisations of the poor (MBOPs), a concept that Chen et al. (2006) defined as a subset of grassroots organisations. According to the scholars, in MBOPs, most of their members are impoverished; their governance structures respond to the needs and aspirations of the impoverished, and at least some contribution from its members is needed in terms of funding. Consequently, non-poor members could eventually help funding and leverage contacts and influence if they do not overrule the relatively poor members or control the organisation as a whole. For Chen et al. (ibid.), MBOPs could also help organise low-income people around livelihood-related issues. This way of organising, in turn, would eventually help bring together people around the basic needs for a sense of dignity and earning a living.

However, this conceptualisation was quickly discarded. After discussing it with academics and colleagues at the conference, I noticed that conceptualising and giving a specific and homogeneous identity to ‘the poor’ presented several risks. From a critical perspective, Walsh et al. (2008) deconstruct how ‘the poor’ are represented, especially by ‘the intellectual left’ through a ‘politics of compassion’ as a fixed and virtuous subject. Consequently, idealising ‘the poor’ could even serve the interests of the hegemonic classes, as it both alleviates guilt and denies the oppressed real power since what makes them virtuous is their very subjection (Russell, 1984). For Walsh et al (2008), to challenge these assumptions, we must examine the stereotypes that bind us to a dialectical ‘us versus them’ and the idealisation of ‘the poor’ as an embodiment of the truth just because they (arguably) organise democratically. As further examined throughout this work, the methodological approach used in this research intended to undermine this relational inequality by building and producing collective knowledge of organisational practices with the most marginalised living in informality.

*1.2.2 Data production in different stages*

Data production took place over two different stages between 2019 and 2021. Ideas for communities to research date back to June 2019 when I met an academic of a South African university, whe I was presenting my work at the conference in Johannesburg (as mentioned above). She told me she worked with colleagues for more than a decade in various informal settlements in another South African city and invited me to meet them. After several meetings with her colleagues, I was offered a visiting scholar position at a local university starting in January 2020. As a visiting scholar, I would be given access to the University's premises and invited to attend scheduled research seminars and workshops taking place during my expected five-month fieldwork, with the commitment of presenting my research findings once I concluded my work. The possibility of being based at that university would also allow me to learn from the vast experience of their academics about civil society in South Africa. More particularly, I would learn from their knowledge and research of informal settlements in the country.

Eventually, we agreed on the most suitable informal settlement to conduct my research. The reasons for choosing this place considered accessibility, personal security, and research interests. As planned, I arrived in South Africa in late- January 2020 for what was expected to be a 5-month period of fieldwork. During the first month and a half in the field, I undertook semi-structured interviews with dwellers, participant observation of forms of organising, and mapped the stakeholders involved in the informal settlement. While the first two methods were part of the original plan, the latter emerged from informal conversations about the issues the participants themselves experienced and prioritised. By then, the focus of my research had refined to understanding how and to what extent power dynamics could affect the organising of people living in informality. In that sense, I considered it necessary to examine both the stakeholders involved in the settlement and the types of power dynamics that were affecting the ways of organising in informality.

To inform my work, I drew on Gaventa’s power cube framework (2006) focusing my examination on three separate but interrelated, dimensions of power affecting the informal settlement: spaces of power, levels of power, and forms of power. The scholar describes the first dimension of his framework, spaces of power, as the opportunities and moments where the individuals (or the community) can influence policies and decisions that may affect their lives and interests. These spaces could be closed, invited, or claimed/created. Also interrelated, levels of power represent the second dimension of his framework and are classified as global, national, and local (through my research I adapt those levels to focus on the national, local, neighbourhood, and household). The forms of power dimension, as proposed by the power cube framework, divide power into visible, hidden, and invisible forms. In addition to the dimensions proposed by the power cube, I also incorporated a power/interest grid (DfID, 2002; Mathur et al., 2007) to examine to what extent the involvement of the different stakeholders could affect the informal settlement organising. By combining different power analysis tools, I aimed to develop more nuanced answers to how, and who experiences power at different levels, what kind of power was being exercised, and how actors were enabled or constrained by that power.

Yet the question was still how to represent those living in informality without falling into the trap of treating people as if they have a homogeneous identity, as above mentioned. In that sense, drawing from postcolonial and subaltern studies, I decided to use the notion of ‘subalterns’. The origin of the term ‘subaltern’ is attributed to Gramsci’s work on cultural hegemony (1971). Gramsci explores how to overcome hegemony by, first, recognising the subaltern and then transforming the subaltern from a position of subordination to one of hegemony through the development of critical consciousness. In recent history, the subaltern would refer to “various forms of domination and marginality that were grounded in exclusion from the political economy of industrialised capitalism” (Bracke, 2016, p.845). In that sense, the subaltern would not just be “a classy word for oppressed, for ‘Other’, for someone who’s not getting a piece of the pie’” (Bracke, 2016, p.839). While the subaltern is oppressed, Spivak (2012) argues, not all the oppressed are subaltern. The difference would lie in how the oppressed relate to the dominant discourse.

Consequently, this posed another challenge to my research. For Bracke (2016), the subaltern cannot be represented adequately by academic knowledge because academic knowledge is a practice that actively produces subalternity, in the very act of presenting it. For Spivak (1988), this challenge pushes researchers to look for their involvement in creating and reproducing relations of power and subordination. Furthermore, for Imas and Weston (2012) mainstream management and organisation literature in particular has suppressed and derogated the narratives of the oppressed and marginalised, their knowledge, and how they live and organise. In Chapter IV (Methodology), I explain in-depth the ways I intend to represent the voices of the subalterns in this thesis and the ethical considerations of researching in the specific context of an informal settlement

*1.2.3 Change of plans: The Covid-19 outbreak*

By mid-March 2020, my research process faced a new challenge. Due to the Covid-19 outbreak, the South African President declared a nationwide lockdown in March 2020, amidst my research data collection period. During this time, I had to adapt my research approach and methods, shifting from me carrying out interviews face-to-face, to using telephone interviews conducted by my interpreter. This involved a role change for Martin, the interpreter, who took on the position of co-researcher at this point. This adaptation was planned to overcome the limitations of a national lockdown and allow the participatory research approach to continue. In that sense, I agreed with Martin that I would call, and audio record the interviews with those dwellers who spoke English, and Martin would call and interview participants who speak Zulu or Xhosa. The second stage of data production started after I arrived back in the UK in June 2020 and lasted until mid-February 2021. After leaving South Africa, I still had interviewees I could not contact during my fieldwork and other data that I could not collect. As I described in the Methodology chapter, this stage included semi-structured interviews, photovoice-narrative, and focus groups. These methods were coordinated by me and conducted by a team of co-researchers who live in the informal settlement.

As the method relies heavily on the close interaction between researcher and participant, participatory action research methods can be heavily affected by restrictions introduced during a national lockdown. Therefore, this thesis offers a contribution to methodological debates developed in response to measures introduced to control the spread of the Covid-19 virus, including social distancing and travel restrictions. In so doing, it presents innovative approaches that were developed to undertake participatory research from a distance. These methods involved the active participation of three co-researchers (all informal settlement dwellers), who collected data and proposed new topics for the research to address, making them the protagonists of the re-adaptation and developing focus of the research. The participatory approach and co-production of knowledge adopted in this research are committed to reforming research practices by strengthening subaltern communities' voices. Based on this commitment, the following section presents the research question and main aims of this work.

**1.3 Research Question and Aims**

The main research question is: To what extent and how do power dynamics affect the organising of the subalterns in an informal settlement in South Africa? Through a participatory methodological approach, its main aim is to contribute to new theoretical, conceptual, and empirical knowledge on the relationship between power dynamics and organisational practices of the subalterns, focusing on the following objectives:

1. To identify the forms, levels, and spaces of power within the informal settlement, examining to what extent these can alter or perpetuate the factors of subjugation subalterns face.
2. To explore the complexities of the subalterns organising in an informal settlement, addressing how their multiple and heterogeneous identities, overlapping positions, and shifting alliances go beyond fixed and mutually exclusive categories.
3. To address the organising of the subalterns and social sustainability as part of a broader debate on inclusion, social justice, and participation, challenging mainstream technocratic discourses.

Consequently, this work intends to address the different forms the subalterns have been excluded from and how they organise to resist and challenge mainstream management and organisational views. In that sense, critical management theory, postcolonialism, and subaltern studies are approached to question dominating discourses, existing knowledge and forms of practice to reflect on new possibilities for the subalterns. In so doing, it explores the relevance of the notion of the subalterns in Management and Organisational Studies (MOS), looking specifically at informal forms of organising in an informal settlement, which reveals their heterogeneity, differences, and intersecting subjugations. The following section describes how this thesis is structured.

**1.4 Structure of the thesis**

This thesis consists of nine chapters including this introduction. In Chapter Two, I examine mainstream literature of management and organisational studies (MOS) and urban studies to assess the underlying assumptions and construction of ideas that have been universalised to justify specific conceptions and forms of organising. In so doing, I aim to identify the gaps and omissions of mainstream literature regarding the marginalised, their forms of participation, and spaces of informality in urban areas, looking specifically at the Global South. In this chapter, I intend to tackle these gaps by combining alternative approaches from critical management, postcolonialism, and subaltern urban studies.

In Chapter Three, I explore the assumption underlying the arguments presented in the mainstream literature on sustainability, civil society, and community organising. My aim is to address the inherent complexities of the subaltern organising and how their multiple identities, overlapping positions, and shifting alliances go beyond fixed and mutually exclusive categories assumed in mainstream studies. In this section, I reflect on the notions of social sustainability and how its debates have been embedded in the context of capitalism. Consequently, I examine two different frameworks addressing social sustainability as part of a broader debate on inclusion and social justice to overcome these limitations. In so doing, I reflect on the notion of civil society (organisations) and community organising and how mainstream literature has limited its scope of action. Finally, in this chapter, I examine the notions of hegemony and power dynamics to go beyond fixed organisational categories that can, in turn, help address how and to what extent these power dynamics can alter or perpetuate the factors of subjugation that the subalterns face.

In Chapter Four, I present the methodological approach to this research. In this chapter, I discuss the philosophical assumptions and theoretical perspectives that guide my research. Informed by a relativist ontology and a social constructionist epistemology, this research takes an interpretivist approach, where social realities are continuously co-constructed and historically situated. In that sense, this investigation is based on qualitative research, to emphasise the description of context and processes and the relevance given to different understandings of research participants. Consequently, this work considers participatory action research (PAR) as its main strategy and orientation to inquiry to bring together theory and practice in participation with others. Yet the chapter also describes how this strategy had to shift from an original emancipatory aim to a more participatory-oriented objective due to the Covid-19 outbreak amidst my fieldwork. This shift, in turn, explains why and how the research methods were adapted in response to measures introduced to control the spread of Covid-19, including social distancing and travel restrictions. Overall, this chapter presents some innovative approaches developed to undertake participatory research from a distance.

In Chapter Five, I conceptualise power dynamics and subalternity, the two main dimensions addressed in this thesis, exploring the complexities, tensions, and contradictions of the power dynamics of the subalterns organising in Magangeni informal settlement. My aim is to contribute to new conceptual, theoretical, and empirical knowledge on the relationship between power dynamics, subaltern organisational processes and practices, and social change in an informal settlement. In that sense, this chapter identifies the different stakeholders affecting Magangeni power dynamics, its multiple alliances, and how these can alter or perpetuate the dynamics of subjugation that the subalterns face. In so doing, it serves as an introduction for the following three chapters. While the power dynamics of the subalterns organising in Magangeni is my primary research topic, there are three issues related to the subalterns organising in the informal settlement that the co-researchers identified: gender-based violence and self-organising, covid-19, and a fire incident in October 2020. Each of these topics is addressed in a separate chapter. Each of these chapters, in turn, includes a findings section and an analysis section linking the empirical material to debates in the extant literature.

In Chapter Six, I focus on power dynamics and subaltern informal organising, exploring events, experiences, and reflections around gender-based violence (GBV) and women organising in Magangeni informal settlement. Drawing on the data gathered and the co-researchers’ crucial support, three main challenges of being a woman in Magangeni informal settlement are identified; these revolve around physical violence, sexual violence, and safety and security. In the analysis section, I first examine how the identified challenges operate at different levels, spaces, and forms of power involving various stakeholders affecting gender-based violence and women’s organising in the informal settlement. By drawing on postcolonial, decolonial, and subaltern studies, I then reflect on the notions of heterogeneity and strategic essentialism for understanding female dwellers organising in Magangeni. This section intends to explore subaltern women’s organising as part of a broader debate on inclusion, social justice, and participation. In that sense, it does not intend to address current discussions on gender studies literature, as those debates fall beyond the scope of this research.

In Chapter Seven, I explore examples of the ways in which Magangeni informal settlement organised during the Covid-19 pandemic. The findings focus on three challenges that residents of the settlement who participated in this research identified as critical issues: lockdown measures, help and organising in times of Covid-19, and living unemployed and organising in an overpopulated area. For each of the examples, quotes from the interviews with people who participated in the research are presented to illuminate and insert their voices into these accounts. Then, I analyse the power dynamics and forms of subaltern organising amidst the pandemic in Magangeni informal settlement. I first focus on the challenges identified by the research participants and analyse the power dynamics and organising which took place during the national Covid-19 outbreak. Consequently, I focus on subalternity and urban informality to inform a critical analysis of the processes underpinning economic, social, and political inequality that might emerge and perpetuate within the Magangeni informal settlement. In so doing, I reflect on how and to what extent the challenges identified by participants reinforce the need to address the organising of the subalterns as part of a broader debate on inclusion, social justice, and participation.

In Chapter Eight, I draw on data gathered about a fire that broke out in the settlement in October 2020. The account addresses two related topics: organising the help offered by stakeholders’ following the fire and the challenges the fire caused the research participants. The research participants’ self-identified challenges are presented and then discussed in relation to a) visible and invisible forms of power that shape these dynamics and b) both the invited and self-claimed spaces of participation. In so doing, this analysis identifies the different actors involved in those power dynamics and how these actors interact. Building on this analysis, the links between subalternity and the dwellers organising after the fire outbreak are explored. This is achieved through an analysis of the relationships between ‘difference’, subalternity, and the role of NGOs after the fire. Importantly, forms of organising by the dwellers include self-identified solutions to reduce their levels of vulnerability and cope with future fire outbreaks and these are discussed too. Finally, the section considers how and to what extent the organising of the dwellers after the fire outbreak relates to what has been considered a critical feature of South African subalterns’ organisation since the return of democracy - namely, debates around whether securing narrow improvements within local residential areas is a better approach than seeking large-scale transformations.

In Chapter Nine, I summarise the main research findings and provide a reflection on my methodological approach. This chapter first addresses the three research aims to then answer its main research question. Consequently, it identifies the main methodological, empirical, theoretical, and conceptual contributions this research aims to add to the existing literature. Finally, I reflect on the limitations and tensions of conducting critical participatory action research in Magangeni informal settlement amidst the Covid-19 pandemic.

**Chapter II: Literature Review**

**The omissions of the subalterns and informality in mainstream CMS**

This chapter examines mainstream literature of critical management studies (CMS) and urban studies to assess the underlying assumptions and construction of ideas that have been universalised to justify specific conceptions and forms of organising. This section aims to identify the gaps and omissions of mainstream literature regarding the marginalised, their forms of participation, and spaces of informality in urban areas, looking specifically at the Global South. The chapter intends to tackle these gaps by combining alternative approaches from critical management, postcolonialism, and subaltern urban studies.

The first section analyses the concept of ‘the subaltern’, the lack of voice they have had in society, and the ways certain elites have spoken for them. The aim is not to identify an alternative truth but to recognise the existence of a multiplicity of voices and possibilities, which might help challenge mainstream assumptions. The second section introduces the subaltern urbanism paradigm to explore the spatiality in which individuals and organisations of informal settlements may participate and how these places have been represented in mainstream discourse. This part highlights the relevance of moving beyond the in/formal dichotomy as a critical element for social change in informal settlements. The last section examines participation and some of its obstacles to social transformation. It first analyses some of the debates in the mainstream literature and then offers a critical view of these debates that links issues of participation to political theory. The main aim is to explore to what extent and how participation contributes to political learning processes among the subaltern. In so doing, the discussion moves from purely theoretical analysis towards more transformative practices able to alter oppressive power dynamics.

**2.1 The exclusion of the subalterns**

The origin of the term ‘subaltern’ is attributed to Gramsci’s work on cultural hegemony (1971). Gramsci explores how to overcome hegemony by, first, recognising the subaltern and then transforming the subaltern from a position of subordination to one of hegemony through the development of critical consciousness (Bracke, 2016). Gramsci (1971) recognises that subalternity is an intersection of class, race, and culture that works in different modalities in specific historical contexts. Consequently, Gramsci was interested in the conditions of subaltern life and the mechanisms that kept them in a state of subalternity. In that sense, he explored how to overcome hegemony by, first, recognising the subalterns and then transforming the subaltern from a position of subordination to one of hegemony through the development of critical consciousness (Bracke, 2016). To cease to be a subaltern, the subalterns should look beyond their identities to historicise and conceptualise the relations that cause their subordination (Srinivas, 2013). In recent history, the subaltern would refer to “various forms of domination and marginality that were grounded in exclusion from the political economy of industrialised capitalism” (Bracke, 2016, p.845).

Bracke (2016) adds that it is not only about considering the subaltern in mainstream literature but reflecting from which location is the subaltern to be approached and thought and why this positionality matters. The scholar suggests that “the subaltern points to power and representation, and the difﬁculty of representing the subaltern points to the power of disciplinary knowledge in the academy. The subaltern cannot be represented adequately by academic knowledge because academic knowledge is a practice that actively produces subalternity, in the very act of presenting it” (p.846). This critique represents a significant challenge to academics and intellectuals’ role in silencing subaltern voices. For Spivak (1988), it pushes researchers to look for their involvement in creating and reproducing relations of power and subordination. At the core of Spivak’s critique “is the incapacity of westerners to listen or hear the other, beyond enforcing and projecting their own Eurocentric sensibilities upon them – rendering the subaltern unseen and unheard” (Darder, 2018, p.94). In the same vein, Imas and Weston (2012) affirm that mainstream management and organisation literature communicates a culture of technocracy, efficiency, and neoliberalism that subjugates communities and people of the entire south. In so doing, the ontological and epistemological circumstances in which millions of people organise and manage in the Global South have been invisible from mainstream management and organisation studies. For the scholars, mainstream literature has suppressed and derogated the narratives of the oppressed and marginalised, their knowledge, and how they live and organise. Following these critiques, subaltern researchers have arguably been encouraged by existent subaltern studies to deconstruct and desacralize colonising theories and texts, based upon their own subaltern lived histories of struggle and survival as subordinated intellectuals capable of voicing and living their commitment to an anti-colonial vision of the world (Santos, 2005: Darder, 2018). This would entail “a decolonizing ethical sensibility of difference that centres the subaltern voice as communal, demythologizes commonsensical notions of knowledge production, exposes the coloniality of power, disrupts Eurocentric epistemicides, and provides itinerant re-readings of subalternity” (Darder, 2018, p.97). In Chapter IV (Methodology), I explain in-depth the ways the voices of the subalterns intend to be represented in this thesis and the ethical considerations of researching in the specific context of an informal settlement[[3]](#footnote-3).

For Spivak, “the subaltern would not just be “a classy word for oppressed, for ‘Other’, for someone who’s not getting a piece of the pie’” (Bracke, 2016, p.839). Spivak (2005) argues that while the subaltern is oppressed, not all the oppressed are subaltern. The difference would lie in how the oppressed relate to the dominant discourse, as previously examined in the first section of this chapter. Moreover, in her later work, Spivak (2012) suggests the world would be witnessing the rise of the ‘new subaltern’. In the current conjuncture of global capitalism, she argues, the subaltern would not be entirely marginalised but integrated into new ways within the circuits of production. In the same vein, Bayat (2000) affirms that one of the significant consequences of globalisation in postcolonial societies has been the double process of integration, on the one hand, and marginalisation on the other. Integration might even develop as a process of ‘adverse incorporation’, through which different livelihood strategies would be constrained by social, economic, and political relations over lengthy periods and at multiple spatial levels (Hickey and Du Toit, 2013). In community-based organisations in the Global South, this would eventually create the need to achieve short-term and immediate outcomes, postponing other needs and rights in the long term, as further addressed in Chapter III. Especially among the marginalised in the urban context, many would find it challenging to live and work within the market discipline, contracts, and bureaucratic rationale, seeking alternative or ‘informal’ institutions and relations in terms of production, trade, and housing. In that sense, the new subalternity might need to consider the diversity of organised actors, positions, agendas, and the various spatial scales of social struggle involved in informality and collective organising for understanding the complexities of informal livelihoods (Lindell, 2010).

*2.1.1 The epistemic violence dilemma of subaltern women*

Among the subaltern groups, Spivak identifies women. One of the main ideas in Spivak’s “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (1988) is that subaltern women would suffer “epistemic violence”, namely the violence inflicted through thought, speech, and writing, whereby their voice and agency are ignored. For Spivak, women would be doubly marginalised or denied a voice. According to the scholar, patriarchy/sexism and colonialism join with one another -and with economic, scholarly, and other forms of power- to oppress women and produce a global society that, according to the scholar, is exclusive and repressive to its core. To illustrate the double subjugation of subaltern women, Spivak describes Western men intervening between Indian women and Indian men with the underlying belief that white men know what Indian women want and act on their behalf (Riach, 2017). In the same vein, Manning (2021) deploys critical insights from decolonial feminists to unpack how the discourse about Global South women has silenced their voices and agency. As Said criticised in *“Orientalism”* (1978) the ways common Orientalist stereotypes always positioned the Oriental as an object and the European as someone who was questioning, interpreting, and somehow rescuing them; Manning critically examines the western representation of women as ‘the other’ and exposes how knowledge produced in and by the West is layered with colonial power. For the scholar, it is decolonial feminist theory that would provide a space for the voices and experiences of silenced ‘othered’ women to “bring new geopolitics of knowledge and knowing from the perspective of the gendered colonial difference” (Manning, 2021, p.1203). As examined throughout this work, this research intends to open new spaces to those who have been made voiceless in the knowledge production of mainstream western management and organisation studies in the Global South.

This chapter has, so far, analysed the relevance of listening to the voice of the subaltern. As stated by Frenkel and Shenhav (2006, p.872), hearing the subaltern “does not imply that it represents an alternative truth to that represented by hegemonic cultures. However, this paradigm encourages a multiplicity of voices and possibilities, which might challenge the assumptions upon which our perspective of the world is built”. The following section introduces the subaltern urbanism paradigm to explore the spatiality where individuals and organisations of informal settlements may participate. It intends to recognise spaces of poverty and forms of subaltern agency that are often neglected in mainstream theory. The section also covers how ‘urban informality’ has been presented as opposed to the formality of urban planning systems and why it is vital to move beyond this in/formal dichotomy as a critical element for social change.

**2.2 The Subaltern Urbanism Paradigm**

United Nations defines slums as overcrowded areas combining inadequate access to water, sanitation, and other infrastructure; poor structural quality of housing; and insecure residential status (UN-Habitat, 2013). In urban housing, slums are often presented as part of the ‘megacity’. These are cities of ‘the Third World’ suffering the problems of ‘underdevelopment’ and poverty, as opposed to the ‘global city’ –urban nodes that would command and control the world economy (Roy, 2011). Slums are also represented as part of the ‘urban informality’, as opposed to the formality of urban planning systems, the formal decision-making processes, and the law (Dupont et al., 2016). This formal/informal dichotomy, in turn, made authorities diagnose informality not only as an obstacle to the attainment of ‘the modern city’ but as a deviation from the norm, namely a pathology (Kamete, 2013). Accordingly, urban planning would serve to maintain order and control space in urban areas, defining standards of normality and appropriateness through ‘regulation’ and ‘correction’ (ibid.).

Kamete (2013) affirms that ‘informality’ has been reduced to a technical issue requiring technical expertise solutions. Instead, what the scholar proposes is “to take informality back to the broader political and social sphere and insert it into the broader debates about social justice and economic and political governance” (p.648). This shift would eventually help link informality to the debates on participation, inclusion, and identities of the subalterns. As described in the previous section, MOS has arguably lacked critical engagement in these debates hence it could benefit from engaging with these discussions originated in urban studies. Consequently, this thesis attempts to bridge the debates between these two fields of study.

To address this gap in mainstream literature, Lindell (2010) examines the complexities involved in forming the political subjectivities and the collective identities of the ‘informal’. The scholar questions what she considers a deeply rooted tendency to assume that informal identities are given, permanent, and single. Instead, Lindell suggests that individual and collective actors can carry multiple, sometimes contradictory, ambiguous identities that are always transitory. Hence informal actors could experience different forms of injustice and occupy various, rather than single, subject positions. According to Lindell, the different identities of the informal are constructed and reconstructed through interactions with other collective actors in civil society, in what she identifies as a networked politics of informality (Lindell, 2010). The significance of these relations also lies in the conflicts and dissensus that may arise between such actors, encompassing a variety of oppositions that may or may not- assume collective forms. As Lindell suggests, this entangled set of relations should consider “multiple identities, overlapping positions and shifting alliances that are all part of the diverse and contingent politics of informal livelihoods in the South” (ibid, p.219). To examine the complexities of the multiple organisational forms, identities, and positions of the subalterns in the context of informality, this thesis draws on the subaltern urbanist paradigm. ‘Subaltern urbanism’ is a radical paradigm that challenges the dominant narratives of the ‘megacity’ and the fixed notions of informality. It discards the differentiation of urban studies between the legal and illegal, the authorised and the unauthorised, for considering them arbitrary and a site of considerable power and violence (Roy, 2011). Instead, the subaltern paradigm recognises the slum as “a terrain of habitation, livelihood and politics… (And) it seeks to confer recognition on spaces of poverty and forms of popular agency than often remain invisible and neglected in the archives and annals of urban theory” (ibid, p.224).

In South Africa, slums are known as informal settlements. While the National Census characterise informal settlements in terms of the substandard building materials of the dwelling, the South African National Department of Human Settlements (NDHS) identifies informal settlements based on the following characteristics: illegal status of the occupied land; inappropriate locations; restricted public and private sector investment; poverty and vulnerability/lack of access to basic services; and the social stress under which the inhabitants live (HDA, 2013). Arguably associated with the history of apartheid (see next chapter), the South African government intended to eradicate informal settlements moved by a genuine desire to overcome and respond to the historical inequalities of segregation and dispossession in the country (Braathen et al., 2014).

In that sense, housing policies of the beginning of the 2000s focused on the physical, economic, political, and social differences between informal housing and formal housing. Theoretically, the processes of housing formalisation were aimed to help obtain emancipatory social change, assuming higher levels of dignity and equality for dwellers and their families as possible outcomes (Braathen et al., 2014; Meth, 2020). However, according to Meth (2020), the housing policy of informal settlement eradication in South Africa assumed and extended the discursive divide between formality and informality in the country. For the scholar, on the one hand, denigrated informality justifying its eradication; on the other hand, it valued formality and the properties of formal housing. Nonetheless, the language around the formal/ informal dichotomy began to change over the last few years. The government assumed it would not meet the housing delivery targets and shifted its policies to upgrading ‘informal settlements’, focusing on providing services rather than merely on eradication (Braathen et al., 2014). In other words, they moved from suggesting informal housing was unacceptable to acknowledging a more significant role for informality.

While mainstream MOS has understood management and organising as a set of skills and best practices independent of the context (Thomas, 1996), mainstream urban theory literature has reduced informality to a technical issue requiring technical solutions (Kamete, 2013). By building and promoting a discourse based on the asymmetries between the West and the rest, the core and the periphery, and the formal and the informal, mainstream MOS and urban studies have neglected the particularities and complexities of the subalterns living and organising in informal settlements, arguably perpetuating their exclusion and marginalisation. And while CMS has engaged with alternative organising practices of social movements and community-based organisations, the lives of the marginalised would remain unexplored (Reedy et al., 2016). In that sense, drawing on postcolonial and subaltern studies -including insights from the subaltern urbanism paradigm- this thesis intends to insert informality into broader debates of social justice and social change. Consequently, it aims to address the complexities, ambiguous, and sometimes contradicting identities and forms of organising of the subaltern. In so doing, this thesis reflects on the different ways the subalterns have been (and can be) approached, represented, and considered. The following section examines participation and some of its obstacles to social transformation. It first analyses mainstream discussions and then critically links participation to political theory. The main aim is to explore how and in which conditions participation can contribute to political learning processes among the subalterns, moving the discussion from purely theoretical analysis to transformative practices able to alter oppressive power dynamics.

**2.3 The political and contended meanings of participation**

*2.3.1 Participation as a double-edged sword*

Participation in managing development organisations and programmes and projects arguably emerged in response to manifest failures of traditional 'top-down' management systems in developing countries (Brett, 2003). Participation has been defined as a fluid and flexible concept, a means and an end, a construct wherein many purposes -including human rights, transparency, and democracy- can be achieved (Adams, 1984; Brinkerhoff, 1999). Including the participation and perception of beneficiaries is advocated in development studies to evaluate organisations’ effectiveness and improve the quality of their governance (Brown, 2005; Stone and Ostrower, 2007; Hsieh, 2010). Other studies also demonstrate how participation can help achieve organisational goals and increase legitimacy in organisations (Kissane and Gingerich, 2004; Kilby, 2006). Besides, participation would arguably offer a better understanding of local needs and could help to address sustainability processes, locality development, and empowerment (Pilisuk et al. 1996; Brett, 2003).

On the other hand, some suggest the theoretical ideal of participation is not working as the tool for the emancipation and distribution of power that its rhetoric proposes. Instead, several practices embracing participation of the subaltern would be maintaining power relationships and masking this power in what has been defined as the ‘tyranny’ of participation (Cooke and Kothari, 2001; Christens and Speer, 2006). In ‘Participation: The New Tyranny?’ (Cooke and Kothari, 2001), several scholars question the empowerment that participation intends to achieve. The idea of empowerment within participation would represent a psychological state denoting individual initiative, responsibility and vibrant economic activity, rather than a collective phenomenon through which the community could produce structural change (Christens and Speer, 2006). The individualisation and depoliticisation of participation and empowerment would have served to entrench participatory methods on another facet of tyranny. Namely, incorporating subaltern individuals in projects they cannot challenge and foreclosing discussion of alternative visions of development (Henkel and Stirrat, 2001; Kothari, 2001). As further addressed in the following chapters, these ‘invited spaces’ of participation could eventually represent ‘invisible forms of power’ where the community would validate meanings already shaped.

Ultimately, the underlying discourse of participatory development would then be far from a radical political act emerging from the communities. Advocacy for participatory development would appear to some scholars as a pragmatic interest strategy to achieve development outputs without being seen as an imposition (Cooke and Kothari, 2001). Besides, when participatory development privileges the ‘community’ or ‘the local’ as the site where empowerment is assumed to occur, communities risk being idealised as homogenous and unproblematic (Mohan, 2001). This idealisation can draw a veil over repressive structures (of gender or class, for example) and deflect attention away from broader power relationships that would frame the construction of development problems (Mohan and Stokke, 2000). As addressed in the next chapter, power dynamics can be present in different forms and levels, and community members can have both dominant and subordinate relationships within specific settings. Further critiques suggest participatory methods might wrongly assume that locals have not got their ways of organising, forcing them to do it in a new way (Brett, 2003). Besides, studies conducted by the World Bank addressed that participatory projects cost them between ten and fifteen per cent more on average than non-participatory ones (Rietbergen- McCracken, 1996).

The following subsection analyses participatory processes from a radical political view responding to some of the mentioned critiques. It proposes an alternative approach to consider, not to disable previous theories but to understand the duality of participation as a social process.

*2.3.2 The politics of participation in development*

In 2004, in part as a response to ‘Participation: The New Tyranny’, Hickey and Mohan edited ‘Participation: From Tyranny to Transformation’, where several concepts were contested with new theoretical and practical approaches to participation. The starting point of the publication recalls the ‘big D/ little d development’ divide and what is also defined as the imminent/immanent debate (Cowen and Shenton, 1996). Namely, the relationship between development in the form of specific interventions and development as a historical process of social change, and the tendency within contemporary development studies to focus on the first.

The main critiques of participatory development in Cooke and Kothari (2001) focused on the failure to engage with the ‘immanent’ conditions under which development occurs (Hickey and Mohan, 2004). Therefore, if the intended goal is that participatory processes lead to any form of social transformation, an analysis of capitalism and a well-developed political-economic framework to understand its determining factors must be addressed. This idea of framing participation concerning structural contexts would help not only to be more realistic about what is or is not possible to achieve but, more importantly, to be more explicit about the immanent obstacles to social transformation and increased levels of social inclusion (Bebbington, 2004). To link participation to the political sphere means rethinking how participation is often conceived in the development context. Extending the idea of participation to citizenship allows an understanding of participation as a political right and not merely as ‘an invitation offered to beneficiaries of development’ (Gaventa, 2004). While even the liberal versions of citizenship would have always included notions of political participation as a right, it is by adding participation in social and economic life that social rights are re-politicised through the reorganisation of citizens as their ‘active creators’ (ibid.) If participation is established as a political right that the subaltern can claim, it might then provide “a means of transcending the distinction between imminent and immanent forms of participatory development, situating participation concerning the politics of inclusion and exclusion that shape popular agency beyond particular interventions” (Mohan and Hickey, 2004, p.70).

To what extent does participation contribute to political learning processes among the subaltern, and the scope they have to reshape political dynamics of power, are some of the questions that still need to be addressed (Williams, 2004). This questioning would potentially allow moving the discussion from purely theoretical or academic analysis to transformative practices able to alter oppressive power dynamics. In turn, this transformation could help encompass longer-term political projects and reshape political networks within a discourse of rights and a fuller sense of citizenship, as previously described. In conclusion, participatory approaches appear to be most likely to succeed when (1) they seek to engage with development as an ‘immanent’ process; (2) they aim specifically at securing citizenship right for marginal groups; and (3) they are pursued as part of a broader radical political project able to challenge existing power relations (Mohan and Hickey, 2004). Yet, to understand the real possibilities of participatory politics in local communities, there is no point in being naïve in idealising participation or disabling its practice through a ‘tyranny’ critique. The actual challenge is to understand the duality inherent to these social processes and to use the dynamic nature of such duality to identify opportunities for social justice and social change (Cleaver, 2004).

**2.4 Conclusion**

Chapter II examined mainstream CMS literature, and urban studies, to assess the underlying assumptions and construction of ideas that have been universalised to justify specific conceptions and forms of development. By drawing on alternative approaches from critical management, postcolonialism, and subaltern studies, the chapter identified some of the gaps and omissions of mainstream literature regarding the marginalised in urban areas and their forms of participation. I argued that mainstream CMS has not considered the particular contexts of the marginalised organising in urban areas in the Global South, neglecting the subalterns and the complexities of power dynamics in informality. Hence, I emphasised the need to examine new and alternative ways of thinking and understanding the subalterns, their forms of participation, and the spaces they occupy in urban areas. In so doing, this thesis also acknowledges how academic production inevitably implies some forms of oppression of the subalterns, too (see Chapters IV and V). And while there seems not to be a straightforward solution to this dilemma, by problematising and reflecting on my positionality as a researcher, this work aims to contribute to the debate on the representation of the subalterns in CMS.

This chapter highlighted the need to recognise the existence of a multiplicity of voices and possibilities of the subaltern, which might help to challenge mainstream assumptions and break away from the logic of subordination. It also examined the importance of moving beyond the in/formal dichotomy as a critical element for social change in informal settlements. Informality should not be seen as an obstacle to the attainment of ‘the modern city’, nor as a pathology or a technical issue requiring technical expertise solutions. Instead, informality should be inserted into the broader debates on social justice, participation, inclusion, and the formation of the subaltern's political subjectivities and (collective) identities. Finally, the chapter analysed how participatory approaches are more likely to succeed when they secure citizenship rights to the subalterns and when they are pursued as part of a broader political project able to challenge existing power relations. It emphasised the ways participation can contribute to the processes of political learning among the subalterns and the relevance of moving the discussion from purely theoretical analysis towards more transformative practices able to alter oppressive power dynamics.

The next chapter examines the underlying assumptions and discourses of mainstream development studies and organisation studies on sustainability, civil society, and community organising. The main aim of the chapter is to address the inherent complexities of the subaltern organising and how their multiple identities, overlapping positions, and shifting alliances go beyond fixed categories assumed in mainstream studies. The chapter intends to tackle these gaps by drawing on alternative approaches from critical theory and subaltern studies.

**Chapter III: Literature Review**

**Toward an integrated and place-based oriented approach of the subaltern organising**

Chapter II identified the gaps and omissions of MOS and urban studies mainstream literature regarding the subaltern and their forms of participation in urban areas in the Global South. Chapter III explores the assumption underlying the arguments presented in the mainstream literature on sustainability, civil society, and community organising. This chapter addresses the inherent complexities of the subaltern organising and how their multiple identities, overlapping positions, and shifting alliances go beyond fixed and mutually exclusive categories assumed in mainstream studies. The chapter intends to tackle these gaps by drawing on alternative approaches from critical theory, urban studies, and subaltern studies. In so doing, it reflects on the notions of social sustainability and how its debates have been embedded in the context of capitalism. Consequently, it examines two different frameworks addressing social sustainability as part of a broader debate on inclusion and social justice to overcome these limitations. Accordingly, it reflects on the notion of civil society (organisations) and community organising and how mainstream literature has limited its scope of action. Finally, this chapter examines the notions of hegemony and power dynamics to go beyond fixed organisational categories that can, in turn, help address how and to what extent these power dynamics can alter or perpetuate the factors of subjugation that the subalterns face.

The first section examines the concept of sustainability, introducing the ‘three-pillar model’ and the particularities of social sustainability as a ‘stand-alone pillar’ in the context of a capitalist world order. It then offers an alternative view of sustainability that understands economic, environmental, and social concerns as intersecting in the practices and perspectives of the subaltern in urban areas. The section highlights the relevance of place-based, process-oriented perspectives that understand social, economic, and environmental sustainabilities as integrated concepts. The second section explores different groups of organisations at the grassroots levels that might interact within the specific settings of an informal settlement. It first covers mainstream definitions of NGOs, CBOs, and social movements. It then analyses the complex forms of civil society organisations that exist today and the various ways in which different institutions and the subalterns can negotiate these structures to facilitate change. The section examines the role of civil society as a space for counter-hegemonies and addresses the further complexities that arise when analysing the different power dynamics that the subaltern might encounter within their particular settings. The third and last section explores different debates on community organising. It describes ‘social action’ and ‘community development’ as two different ways of organising. It then introduces the concepts of ‘everyday practices’ and ‘quiet encroachment’ as alternative ways of ‘unorganised’ participation and collective resistance for social change. It concludes by addressing to what extent and how all different strategies could coexist and work simultaneously and iteratively in an informal settlement.

**3.1 Sustainability re-examined**

Founded in the mid-1980s, the United Nations Commission on Environment and Development (UNCED) investigated the relationship between nature and society, identifying multidimensional solutions to the environmental world crisis. The commission, chaired by the former Norwegian Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland, published in 1987 its report ‘Our Common Future’ (also known as ‘The Brundtland Report’). The report described what today is the most widely adopted definition of sustainable development, “(the) development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (UNCED in McKenzie, 2004, p.2). According to the report, the definition contains at least two key concepts. Firstly, the notion of needs, particularly those essential needs of ‘the poor’, to whom priority was to be given; secondly, the idea of limitations on the environment’s ability to meet present and future needs (WCED, 1987). However, in its description of the basic human needs that development needed to ensure, the ‘Brundtland Report’ only mentioned livelihood, energy, housing, health care, water supply and sanitation (WCED, 1987). Other needs, including cultural needs (such as education and social relations), political needs (such as participation and human rights) and social needs (such as social security), were neglected (Fuchs, 2017). This chapter suggests the needs of the present, what to sustain and to whom will vary in each particular context and should offer the community the possibility of deciding how to organise for it.

*3.1.1 The social dimension of sustainability*

During the 1990s, sustainable development shifted from focusing on ecological issues toward broader societal and integrative concepts. The three pillars of sustainability -also recognised as the 'triple bottom line model' (Elkington, 1999) - now comprised three different aspects related to sustainability: environmental, economic, and social issues. Known as the three "Es" (Environmental quality, Economic prosperity, and Equity), or as the 'three Ps" (Planet, Profit, and People), the three dimensions were generally assumed to be equally important and mutually supportive (Griessler and Littig, 2005; Boström, 2012). Consequently, during the last decades, the 2002 ‘World Summit on Sustainable Development’ in Johannesburg, the ‘2012 Rio+20 Conference’, and the ‘2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development’ of the United Nations in 2015 (consisting of 17 Sustainable Development Goals) have all intended to integrate economic, environmental and equity issues into the sustainability agenda (Fuchs, 2017). In an attempt to define social sustainability, Polese and Stren (2000) describe it as a type of development that considers a 'harmonious evolution of civil society' promoting the coexistence of culturally and socially diverse groups, encouraging social integration and at the same time improving the quality of life of all segments of the population. More specifically, Bramley and Power (2009) highlight two overarching dimensions of social sustainability: social equity aspects and issues related to the sustainability of the community itself. According to the scholars, whereas social equity centres upon a distributive notion of social justice related to access to services, facilities, and opportunities, sustainability of the community would involve interaction with other residents or social networks, the pride or sense of place, participation in collective community activities, and security.

Yet, for several critical scholars, the prevailing neoliberal world order may affect these understandings of social sustainability. For Goodland (2002), capitalism may weaken social sustainability by promoting competition and individualism over cooperation within communities. This idea is shared by Barbosa et al. (2014), who address that one of the problems of sustainability is that it is embedded in the contradictions of capitalism, as “a democratic ecological and social order does not match to a market order which seeks the profit and an uncontrolled accumulation” (p.9). In the same vein, Foladori (2005) affirms social sustainability is still restricted to technical changes that can improve living standards in certain specific but limited sectors, always within the framework of the capitalist market system. His concern is that the relations of property and the practices of capitalist appropriation that generate poverty and social differentiation are undisputed under the previous definitions of social sustainability.

Numerous scholars (Foladori, 2005; Cuthill, 2009; Vallance et al., 2011) also affirm that the social dimension gains less attention than the ecological and economic dimensions or is simply dismissed from the analysis of sustainable development. Arguably, one of the reasons why the social dimension of sustainability gets less attention than the other two identified pillars is the difficulty to operationalise it (Griessler and Littig, 2005). In that sense, Missimer et al. (2017) developed a framework focusing on specific aspects that a social system should preserve to achieve social sustainability. These aspects include trust, common meaning (that would help groups keep together), diversity (of gender, age, and skills), capacity for learning and capacity for self-organisation (that would both be useful to address change and deal with it effectively). On the one hand, this original framework addresses the essential aspects of an idealised social system. Still, it does not explore whether and how these aspects can conflict with each other. It does not examine how, for example, diversity could limit common meaning (considering dissensus and disagreement within groups, as previously discussed in Chapter II). On the other hand, the framework addresses change as a critical element to tackle social sustainability. This perspective may allow exploring the dynamic dimensions and meanings of social sustainability and focusing on and re-thinking the aims and objectives of the subalterns to challenge the conditions of capitalism. Despite its limitation, this framework has the merit to encompass both what is needed to sustain and what is needed to transform.

Vallance et al. (2011) propose another comprehensive analysis of social sustainability to identify the contradictions and possibilities within sustainable development. The first dimension of their scheme is 'development sustainability' which includes aspects related to poverty and inequality, such as addressing basic needs and social justice. A second variable, 'bridge sustainability, ' concern changes in behaviour to achieve environmental goals. The third category, 'maintenance sustainability', refers to the conservation of sociocultural features in the face of change and how people actively resist or embrace those changes. Whereas the 'development' part of social sustainability deals with what people of a community need, 'bridge sustainability' does it with what is good for the environment, and 'maintenance sustainability' with what people want. Vallance et al. understanding of social sustainability is particularly relevant for this research, mainly because of their emphasis on the right to self-determination and the multiple positions and interests intrinsic in social systems. Most importantly, Vallance et al. introduce the idea of social sustainability interlinked with environmental goals and not as stand-alone pillars. The relevance of moving beyond the representation of social sustainability as a ‘third pillar’ may help not reinforce disciplinary divisions or promote trade-offs between all three pillars (Boyer et al., 2016). The following section offers an alternative view of sustainability that understands economic, environmental, and social concerns as intersecting in the practices and perspectives of the subalterns in urban areas. In so doing, this work adopts and highlights the relevance of placed-based, process-oriented perspectives that understand social, economic, and environmental sustainabilities as integrated concepts that need to be considered as part of a broader debate on inclusion, social justice, and participation of the subalterns in informal settlements. Table 3A summarises the discussions examined above, highlighting their relevance to the aims of this research.

*Table 3A: Addressing different dimensions of social sustainability*

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Scholars** | **Addressed dimensions** | **Relevance for this research aims** |
| Goodland (2002); Foladori (2005); Barbosa et al. (2014) | Sustainability is embedded in the contradictions of capitalism/ It promotes competition and individualism over cooperation/ Restricted to technical changes in specific but limited sectors  | Address social sustainability as part of a broader debate on inclusion and social justice, challenging the conditions of capitalism |
| Missimer et al. (2017) | Aspects of achieving social sustainability: trust, common meaning, diversity, capacity for learning and capacity for self-organisation | Despite its limitation, this framework has the merit to encompass both what is needed to sustain and what is needed to transform/ Change as a critical element to tackle social sustainability/ Dynamic dimensions and meanings of social sustainability |
| Vallance et al. (2011) | Contradictions and possibilities within sustainable development: 'development sustainability', 'bridge sustainability’, 'maintenance sustainability' | Emphasis on the right of self-determination and the multiple positions and interests intrinsic in social systems/ The idea of social sustainability interlinked with environmental goals and not as stand-alone pillars |

*3.1.2 A fully integrated application of sustainability*

Similar to the definition of sustainable development in the Brundtland Report, social justice issues and maintaining resources for future generations are critical elements of mainstream definitions of urban sustainability (Barbosa et al., 2014). Understood as the ability of urban policies to find a balance between the provision of services, the quality and quantity of social demands, and the interaction with the environment and natural resources (Ascelrad, 1999), urban sustainability appears to integrate social, economic, and environmental sustainabilities. Moreover, “intrinsic to the concept of urban sustainability is the understanding that the form, the infrastructure, the way of life and economy are integrated into the local context, considering its specific ecological, social, cultural and economic variables” (Barbosa et al. 2014, p.7). As stated by Magee et al. (2012, p.240), “contemporary communities need to be understood as upon reflection they would understand themselves—as enmeshed in global systems while striving for local autonomy; … as coherent but necessarily fragmentary collections; and with a present sense of wellbeing heavily conditioned by concerns about sustainability”. Hence, sustainability should be considered as “a social learning process of long term, which is characterised… not as a fixed state of harmony, but rather as a process of change” (Barbosa et al. p.14).

In that sense, Boyer et al. (2016) draw from literature in multiple disciplines, including urban planning and management studies, to highlight the importance of acknowledging ‘place-based, process-oriented perspectives’ that understand the three different pillars of sustainability as integrated concepts intersecting in the practices and perspectives of individuals. The scholars suggest there should not be distinct pillars but overlapping spheres of action in complex and context-specific ways. Place-based and process-oriented sustainability efforts could encourage local ownership of ideas, assure access to necessary resources, and engage citizens in decision-making in “a process of dialogue and negotiation among these diverse individuals with distinct social, economic, and environmental interests” (Boyer et al. 2016, p.12). Besides, this approach could also help recognise diverse non-academic perspectives about local environments to challenge the dominant technocratic sustainability discourse identified in the previous section.

The relevance of examining sustainability as an integrated concept in this research lies in understanding how the lives and organising of the subalterns in an informal settlement are determined by all three, environmental, economic, and social conditions. As further addressed in the following chapters, the organising of informal settlement dwellers is affected by the land they use (in a geographically and sensitive area, where there is a lack of adequate sanitation facilities); by the political and economic world order in which they exist (living at the margins of an unequal society); and by the considerable loss, shock, and human suffering they are exposed to because of all of the above. These conditions, in turn, are dynamic and may be altered by the subalterns to obtain social change. Furthermore, by understanding sustainability from a fully integrated, process-oriented, and place-based approach, this thesis aims to listen to the subalterns that remain on the margins of political discourse, including their voices, adding new and alternative perspectives to sustainable development debates.

This chapter has, so far, analysed the different characteristics of mainstream social sustainability, its aims, and the problems of defining it and operationalising it within a specific political and economic context. It then offered an alternative view of sustainability from a fully integrated, process-oriented, and place-based approach that this thesis adopts. The relevance of addressing sustainability from this approach also allows understanding that the specificities of each particular context can affect groups and individuals’ organising. In that sense, the following section examines different groups of organisations that might interact within the specific settings of an informal settlement. First, the section covers mainstream definitions of NGOs, CBOs, and social movements. It then analyses the complex forms of civil society organisation that exist in the world today and the various ways in which different institutions and the subalterns can negotiate these structures to facilitate change. In so doing, it aims to explore the complexities of the subalterns organising in an informal settlement, addressing how their multiple and heterogeneous identities and shifting alliances can go beyond fixed and mutually exclusive categories defined in mainstream literature.

**3.2 Civil Society Organisations for social change**

The first part of this section explores how different civil society organisations, namely NGOs, CBOs, and social movements, have been described in mainstream MOS and development studies. It then examines how these different forms of organising can be interrelated and why this thesis understands them as relationships and collective processes rather than fixed or static categories. The section ends by addressing civil society as a space for counter-hegemonies reflecting on the different possible power dynamics in an informal settlement. The main aims of this section are (1) to challenge mainstream assumptions and definitions of civil society organisations and (2) to examine the different actors, collective processes and set of relationships that may be involved in the context of an informal settlement organising for social change.

*3.2.1 Non- Governmental Organisations (NGOs)*

NGOs (also known as non-profit organisations, NPOs) have been described through six main characteristics within mainstream development studies: they are voluntary, private, non-profit distributing, organised, self-governing, and have distinctive, shared concerns about development and poverty reduction (Gordenker and Weiss, 1995; Vakil, 1997; Department of Social Development of South Africa, 2016). While the importance of the professionalisation of NGOs has been argued as opposed to the idea of working voluntarily (Gordenker and Weiss, 1995), the discussion at this point is not whether professionals are paid or not. 'Voluntary' in this context means that membership is consensual rather than legally required and that the mechanisms to achieve the objectives of NGOs are through dialogue and negotiation, rather than from incentives of the market or any enforcement of the state (Edwards, 2014). NGOs are therefore considered part of the voluntary non-profit sector (VNPS). This sector is arguably driven by a set of ‘human-core-values’, including more genuinely caring (compared to the for-profit sector), social support, and sharing as primary goals (Smith, 2000). However, the problem of homogeneously defining VNPS through ‘human-core-values’ is that organisations with enormous differences risk being classified in the same group. Yet, while some organisations of the VNPS have multimillion-pound budgets, are highly professionalised, and count with offices in many countries around the world, others may only have tiny budgets and rely merely on unpaid workers (Salamon and Sokolowski, 2016).

The contributions made by these different types of NGOs to development will also vary according to the political context and economic lens through which they are analysed. On the one hand, liberals situate them as a 'third sector' in their assumed democratising role, dealing with the weaknesses of the state (Clarke, 1998; Mercer, 2002). On the other hand, intellectuals and activists of the left focus on NGOs’ responsibility for a structural transformation of society. These responsibilities would include developing a closer relationship with other civil society actors, engaging in knowledge production, and claiming social justice and consciousness within 'little- d development' (Escobar, 1995; Clarke, 1998; Mitlin et al. 2007). 'Little-d development' is a concept described in opposition to 'Big-D Development', where "(the first assumes) the geographically and uneven profoundly contradictory set of processes underlying capitalist development... (while the latter relates to) … the project of intervention in the 'third world' that emerged in a context of decolonisation and the cold war" (Hart, 2001, p.650). According to Banks and Hulme (2012), in 'Big-D Development', service-delivery and advocacy on behalf of the impoverished result in short-term relief not addressing social and economic inequalities experienced by disadvantaged groups. Conversely, in 'little-d development' NGOs arguably recognise the political nature of poverty and inequality playing a supportive role in building the systems, structures and strengths at the grassroots level for sustainability and success.

It has been argued by several development studies scholars that after the end of the Cold War, NGOs perpetuated Big-D Development interventions by taking distance from low-income people and holding accountability more to their donors than to the community (Banks and Hulme, 2012; Edwards, 2014). Consequently, since the late 1980s, NGOs were defined as advocates of modernisation, development, and 'good governance' by Northern donors; and as critical allies by the states because of their impact on employment and service provision (Howell and Pearce, 2001; Banks et al. 2015). This period has been described as 'the rise of the Non-Profit Industrial Complex' (Edwards, 2014), where NGOs professionalised in a technocratic sense and gradually distanced associations from their social base. Consequently, the period raised concerns about the legitimacy of NGOs and because of depoliticising poverty, treating it as a technical problem to solve, lowering levels of participation, empowerment, and true representativeness (Edwards, 1996; Banks and Hulme, 2012; Banks et al. 2015). In that sense, Shivji (2004) criticises how, by pretending to be partners with the government and the donors in policymaking, NGOs let the government ‘off the hook’ by abdicating its primary responsibility, namely, to watchdog the shortcomings in government policies and their implementation, and “struggle for the expansion of space for the people and people’s organisations within the representative institutions of the state” (p.691). In the same vein, the scholar suggests that NGOs cannot substitute themselves for the people, as they “are neither the elected representatives of the people nor mandated to represent them” (ibid.). As mentioned in the previous chapter, the issue of speaking on behalf of others not only concerns NGOs but also pushes researchers to look for their involvement in creating and reproducing relations of power and subordination. In Chapter IV (Methodology), I aim to explain the ways the voices of the subalterns intend to be represented in this thesis and the ethical considerations of researching in the specific context of an informal settlement.

Conversely, the idea of ‘little-d development’ has been closely related to a ‘paradigm shift’ that occurred in rural development during the 1980s and 1990s (therefore coexisting with Big-D Development interventions). This shift was from a top-down approach characterised by national-level policies and external technologies to a bottom-up approach that envisaged rural development as a participatory process to empower rural dwellers (Ellis and Biggs, 2001, p.443). For Cox (1999), in a top-down approach, the state and corporate interests influence civil society towards making it an agency for stabilising the social and political status quo. In a bottom-up sense, in turn, civil society is the realm in which those marginalised by the neoliberal world order can mount their protests and seek alternatives. As further addressed in the Findings and Analysis chapters of this thesis, both ‘little-d development’ and ‘Big-D Development’ interventions coexist and encounter different challenges when incorporating the needs, aims and motivations of the subalterns organising in an informal settlement. Furthermore, by addressing the dynamics and coexistence of both ‘top-down’ and ‘bottom-up’ organising approaches, this thesis intends to contribute to new empirical and conceptual knowledge on the relationship between informal settlement organising and social change.

*3.2.2 Community-Based Organisations (CBOs)*

A group of civil society organisations within the VNPS that arguably challenges ‘top-down’ approaches by incorporating a ‘bottom-up’ approach are community-based organisations (CBOs). As opposed to NGOs, CBOs are defined as membership-based organisations (MBOs) intended to provide both internal accountability (electing their leaders) and external legitimacy (leaders representing their constituency) (Sen, 1999; Chen et al., 2006). Grassroots association (GAs) are part of MBOs and have been characterised as a significantly autonomous, voluntary and citizen-led community group that operates in a relatively small local scope (Seyfang and Smith, 2007). In that sense, Smith (2000) compares Gas and paid-staff organisations in terms of internal structure, internal processes, leaders and environments, life cycle choices, and impact and effectiveness. Among their main differences, GAs appear to have a more informal organisation, more member-benefit goals, a substantial sociodemographic homogeneity, lower professionalism, lower external funding, and higher socio-political activation than paid-staff voluntary groups. Yet, these differences can be contested on a case-to-case basis, with NGOs having high levels of political advocacy or grassroots associations with members from different places and backgrounds. As examined throughout this thesis, the particularities of each political, historical, and social context will also condition the various structures and ways of organising within an informal settlement.

Chen et al. (2006) go further in the analysis to identify a subset of MBOs and GAs, namely membership-based organisations of the poor (MBOPs). In MBOPs, most of their members are impoverished; their governance structures respond to the needs and aspirations of the impoverished, and at least some contribution from its members is needed in terms of funding. Consequently, non-poor members could eventually help funding and leverage contacts and influence if they do not overrule the relatively poor members or control the organisation as a whole. According to the scholars (ibid.), MBOPs could also help organise low-income people around livelihood related issues. For Chen et al., this would eventually help bring together people around the basic needs for a sense of dignity and earn a living. However, conceptualising and giving a specific and homogeneous identity to ‘the poor’ present several risks this research is aware of and intends to address.

From a critical perspective, Walsh et al. (2008) deconstruct how ‘the poor’ are represented, especially by ‘the intellectual left’ through a ‘politics of compassion’ as a fixed and virtuous subject. Consequently, idealising ‘the poor’ could even serve the interests of the hegemonic classes, as it both alleviates guilt and denies the oppressed real power since what makes them virtuous is their very subjection (Russell, 1984). To challenge these assumptions, we must examine the stereotypes that bind us to a dialectical ‘us versus them’ and the idealisation of ‘the poor’ as an embodiment of the truth just because they (arguably) organise democratically (Walsh et al. 2008). As further explained in Chapter IV, the methodological approach used in this research intends to undermine this relational inequality by building and producing collective knowledge of organisational practices and everyday resistance with the subalterns within an informal settlement. The following subsection introduces social movements as another contested concept within civil society organisations.

*3.2.3 Social movements*

Mainstream development studies present social movements as another way of organising at the grassroots level. For Della Porta and Diani (1999, p. 16), social movements are “informal networks, based on shared beliefs and solidarity, which mobilise about conflictual issues, through the frequent use of various forms of protest”. Protest can therefore take on many forms, from those that are permanent to those that are more temporary. The latter includes protest movements, which would emerge and disappear as issues arise, and could even be supported by NGOs (Dupont et al. 2015). Social movements would also play an essential role regarding discourse and ideas, as they can have the power to destabilise norms and taken for granted meanings surrounding poverty debates (Escobar and Alvarez, 1992, in Mitlin and Bebbington, 2006). By creating spaces for the subalterns to participate in discussions from which they have historically been excluded, social movements might challenge hegemonic ideas and actions of society, re-shaping social relationships and state policies (Mitlin and Bebbington, 2006).

For Bebbington et al. (2010), social movements can develop around the distribution and provision of collectively consumed services and a relationship of contestation with the state. Examples include denying assets to particular groups and their persistent lack of secure tenure and essential services. Mitlin and Bebbington (2006) define this situation as accumulation by systematic exclusion and directly involve informal settlement dwellers, as examined in the Findings and Analysis chapters. On the other hand, social movements may also emerge in structured relationships of prejudice based on identity where the contest relationships are not necessarily with the state but within a society, on issues such as gender or ethnicity (Bebbington et al., 2010). As further explored throughout this chapter, this thesis understands that the origins of organising and mobilising in informal settlements may involve both a lack of secure tenure and basic services and relationships of prejudice based on the different identities of the subalterns.

From a different perspective, Runciman (2016) criticises that social movement studies have been dominated by a ‘movement organisation- centric approach’, constraining the analysis of collective action in specific contexts, especially in the Global South. In that sense, the scholar proposes to move “towards a reconceptualization of social movements which links them not to organisations but understanding social movements as a praxis linked to the material experiences of everyday life” (Runciman, 2016, p.613). Runciman suggests situating social movements not as “a particular kind of political actor, but a collective process resulting from material engagements with the world and the attempts to change it” (ibid. p.614). Arguably, this would allow social movements to reflect on the specific historical, political and socio-economic relations of the particular contexts in which they operate. In the same vein, Mitlin and Bebbington (2006) suggest social movements refer to a process of collective action and mobilisation rather than any specific set of organisations. Hence, social movements would include not only formalised actors but “more nebulous, uncoordinated and cyclical forms of collective action, popular protest and networks that serve to link both organised and dispersed actors in processes of social mobilisation” (p.1). The following subsection aims to go beyond the fixed and structured definitions of civil society organisations to a more integrated understanding of collective processes and set of relationships that may be involved in the context of an informal settlement organising for social change. The key characteristics of NGOs, CBOs, and social movements, as described in mainstream studies, are summarised in Table 3B.

*Table 3B: Key characteristics of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs)*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **CSOs** | **Key characteristics (as described in mainstream studies)** |
| NGOs (Also known as non-profit organisations, NPOs) | They are voluntary, private, non-profit distributing, organised, and self-governing, and have distinctive, shared concerns about development and poverty reduction (Gordenker and Weiss, 1995; Vakil, 1997; Department of Social Development of South Africa, 2016). |
| CBOs | Membership-based organisations (MBOs) intended to provide both internal accountability (electing their leaders) and external legitimacy (leaders representing their constituency) (Sen, 1999; Chen et al., 2006). Grassroots association (GAs) are part of MBOs and have been characterised as a significantly autonomous, voluntary and citizen-led community group that operates in a relatively small local scope (Seyfang and Smith, 2007). |
| Social movements | Informal networks, based on shared beliefs and solidarity, which mobilise about conflictual issues, through the frequent use of various forms of protest (Della Porta and Diani, 1999)/ Can develop around the distribution and provision of collectively consumed services and a relationship of contestation with the state. They may also emerge in structured relationships of prejudice based on identity where the contest relationships are not necessarily with the state but within a society, on issues such as gender or ethnicity (Bebbington et al., 2010)  |

*3.2.4 Beyond fixed organisational categories*

The idea of presenting social movements, NGOs, and CBOs as distinct modes of action within civil society is prevalent in mainstream development studies (Brown, 2014). De Souza (2013) states that social movements, as opposed to NGOs, represent a part of society which “does not accept its ‘place’ in the existing ‘social order’ and sometimes does not accept the ‘social order’ itself (that is, the ‘system’ as a whole), more or less (and explicitly or tacitly) questioning problems related to aspects such as exploitation, social injustice, power-asymmetries, identitary stigmatisation and so on” (p.259). As previously described in this chapter, while NGOs have been identified as being accountable primarily to their donors and the state, social movements are most of the time self-funded and, therefore, less susceptible to donor manipulation. Whereas NGOs would provide a platform for middle-class professionals to speak for the subaltern, social movements would allow them to speak for themselves (Brown, 2014). However, describing all social movements as emancipatory and all NGOs as part of a containment system is a simplification that should be resisted (Pithouse, 2013). According to Lipietz (2013, p.251), we should move beyond the binaries of NGOs vs social movements, as “there are porous boundaries, and democratic/ emancipatory practices cannot be clearly attributed to one or the other”. This binary would be “insensitive to the complex forms of civil society organisation that exist in the world today and the manifold ways in which individuals, states and institutions negotiate these structures in order to facilitate change” (Brown, 2014, p.51).

As civil society organisations evolve, they can incorporate multiple purposes and structural features from NGOs, CBOs, and social movements. In that sense, Hasenfeld and Gidron (2005, p.109) suggest “it is time for the intellectual walls that separate civil society, social movement and non-proﬁt service sector theories to come down”. This research understands that civil society organisations are dynamic entities. Throughout their life cycle, they might change and have different strategies to respond to the specific contexts in which they exist. These responses, in turn, can come from tactics that mainstream development studies associate either to NGOs, CBOs, or social movements, indistinctly. By moving beyond binaries and fixed organisational categories, this research intends to recognise the hybridity of specific organisations and forms of organising that can emerge while addressing social change in an informal settlement. Change can arise from different and complex scenarios, including formal and informal actors within dynamic spaces of civil society. Consequently, the following subsection explores the role of civil society as a space for counter-hegemonies examining further complexities that can arise when analysing the different power dynamics that the subalterns may encounter within their particular contexts.

*3.2.5 Civil society as a space for counter- hegemonies*

As NGOs, CBOs, and social movements, civil society is a contested concept that has been studied and defined in various ways under different fields of study. While this section does not intend to include a systematic review of these debates, it does aim to critically address how the term has evolved and how and why this can be relevant for the subalterns organising in an informal settlement.

While Hegel described civil society as an intermediate realm between the state and the family, Marx stated civil society was just another space to stimulate the economic power of capitalism (Kaldor, 2003; Pollard and Court, 2005). It was not until the twentieth century that Gramsci defined civil society as the realm of culture, ideology, and political debate (Jones, 2006). In Gramscian terms, the state had two overlapping domains: a ‘political society’ ruling through force and a ‘civil society’ ruling through consent. To Gramsci (1971), the ruling classes attained and maintained hegemony by the threat of force (coercion) and by moulding opinions and common sense- through language, ideologies, and taken for granted-ideas circulating in society- so that existing political and economic arrangements were seen as natural and beneficial to everyone (consent). In that sense, civil society would constitute a battleground to articulate new visions and ideas to challenge hegemonic assumptions and create new ones (Jones, 2006). At stake here is the dialectical relation between dominant and subaltern forces and how they interplay between consensus and coercion in the struggle for hegemony.

For Girei (2016, p.198), the counter-hegemonic potential of CSOs would depend on their ability to link their agendas organically to those they claim to support and “whether their oppositional voices are able to effect change in the existing order, or whether they are incorporated into that order, affording it wider legitimacy”. Consequently, Kontinen and Millstein (2017) highlight the relevance of approaching civil society from the multi-scalar complexities of development (local, urban, national, regional and global), which inform civil society's organising and mobilising at different spaces. By exploring multi-scalar practices within an informal settlement, this research intends to acknowledge the diversity of subject positions and identities present in organising and how the local and global may interrelate. According to Kontinen and Millstein, multiscale governance analysis has been broadly covered in mainstream development literature. Still, little has been done to explore more explicitly the multi-scalar relations and practices within civil society (ibid.). This research also aims to address how ‘the formal’ and ‘the informal’ modes of organising interact; the different alliances and networks that might be formed; and how different hegemonies can be reproduced, re-constructed, or contested in multiple ways in all these complex scenarios. Consequently, this thesis considers civil society as a relational space where diverse actors, including ‘formal’ organisations and ‘informal’ actors, interact and are involved in multiple struggles at different scales. The following subsection introduces the ‘power cube framework’ (Gaventa, 2006) to address the different forms, levels, and spaces of power and hegemonies that the subaltern can contest (or reproduce) in the context and spatiality of the informal settlement they occupy.

*3.2.6 Analysing Civil Society: The ‘power cube framework’*

The ‘power cube framework’ formulation within development studies can be traced back to Foucault’s work (Gaventa, 2006). Foucault contests the idea that people or groups exercise power through episodic acts of coercion, suggesting power is neither an agency nor a structure. Alternatively, power would be constituted through accepted forms of scientific understanding, knowledge, and ‘truth’ in society (Foucault, 2012). According to Foucault, individuals do not possess or receive power. Instead, power is found in all social interactions in relations that are always in flux and are not stable (Moosavinia et al., 2019). To challenge power thus would not be a matter of looking for ‘absolute truth’ but detaching the power of truth from the hegemonic forms within which it could be operating (Foucault, 2012).

In his ‘power cube framework’, Gaventa (2006) examines three separate but interrelated dimensions of power: spaces, levels, and forms of power (see figure 5A in Chapter V). The scholar describes the first dimension of his framework, spaces of power, as the opportunities and moments where the individuals (or the community) can influence policies and decisions that may affect their lives and interests. These spaces could be closed, invited, or claimed/ created. Closed spaces of power describe decisions made by a set of actors ‘behind doors’ with no intention of including others. Invited spaces of power occur when individuals or organisations are invited to participate by other institutions or organisations. In informal settlements, these institutions or organisations may include local governments, NGOs, or universities researching in the area. Finally, claimed/created spaces of power emerge from popular mobilisation, identity-based concerns or simply spaces in which a community join together in common pursuits (Cornwall, 2002). According to Gaventa’s framework, spaces are dynamic and related hence they will constantly be re-defining and affecting each other.

Also interrelated, levels of power represent the second dimension of his framework and are classified as global, national, and local (Gaventa, 2006). As previously addressed in this section, local forms of power are shaped in relationship to global forces and, at the same time, can affect them. In that sense, a country's political and economic conditions can affect an informal settlement organising. Likewise, the organising and participation within an informal settlement can have repercussions at a national level. The last dimension of the ‘power cube framework’, forms of power, is divided into visible, hidden, and invisible (Gaventa, 2006). Visible forms of power refer to observable decision-making, where formal rules, structures, and procedures operate. Strategies that target this form of power usually try to make the policy process more accountable. In the case of informal settlements, the different policies that affect them might respond to national laws and local government’s urban planning. At the same time, hidden forms of power relate to setting the political agenda. Here is where advocacy strategies intend to influence how the agenda is shaped to increase the visibility and legitimacy of the demands of a specific group of individuals. In informal settlements, advocacy strategies might include, among others, alliances with NGOs, universities, and other CSOs. Finally, invisible forms of power would eventually shape the meanings people are supposed to accept. These forms of power could perpetuate exclusion and inequality by defining what is accepted as normal (VeneKlasen and Miller, 2002; Gaventa, 2006). Examples of invisible forms of power that might emerge in informal settlements include gender-based violence and kinship-related issues, as further addressed in the Findings and Analysis chapters.

Consequently, Gaventa (2006) states that for transformative change to happen, the community (individuals and organisations) has the challenge to align its strategies across these three categories (space, levels, and forms), knowing that strategies for alignment along one dimension only may create the misalignment on another. Therefore, informal settlements dwellers will need to reflect if they are achieving their initial aims and if their organisational practices are helping to maintain, challenge, or promote the causes of poverty and inequality they face. This learning and understanding of social power dynamics might also help them incorporate different strategies and practices to bring about the change they expect. As previously described, ‘informal’ actors can experience different forms of injustice and occupy various subject positions through interactions with other collective actors in society.

Among the challenges for Gaventa’s framework, Pantazidou (2012) identifies the difficulties of translating diagnosis about power relations into effective responses and examining further inequalities such as gender disparities, understanding that power affecting men and women could eventually differ. However, using the ‘power cube framework’ in this research is only a starting point for a more in-depth and contextualised analysis of the informal settlement under study and by no means intends to be a tick-box exercise with fixed definitions or static dimensions. The importance of the ‘power cube framework’ for this research rests precisely on acknowledging a complex set of challenges that local communities may face if they expect to create social change.

This chapter has, so far, examined different ways in which mainstream literature has defined sustainability and civil society organisations. It has aimed to introduce alternative understandings to represent better the complexities of the subalterns organising in informal settlements. Consequently, the chapter has highlighted the relevance of understanding economic, environmental, and social concerns as intersecting in the practices and perspectives of sustainability of the subalterns in urban areas. Moreover, it has analysed the complex forms and interrelations of different groups of civil society organisations at the grassroots levels and the various ways in which the subalterns may challenge power asymmetries to facilitate change. In that sense, the chapter examined the role of civil society as a space for counter-hegemonies addressing several complexities that arise when analysing the forms, levels, and spaces of power that the subalterns might face within their particular context. The following section concludes this chapter by exploring different ways of community organising and individual ‘everyday practices’ as strategies of collective resistance the informal settlement subalterns might adopt for social change.

**3.3 The diverse and contingent politics of organising in informal settlements**

*3.3.1 Social action and community development*

Community organising has been defined as a “collective action by community members drawing on the strength of numbers, participatory processes, and indigenous leadership to decrease power disparities and achieve shared goals for social change” (Staples, 2016, pp. 1–2). According to this definition, community members would take their own decisions about social change, addressing what to alter to improve their lives. Moreover, the community members would provide its leadership for change and exercise collective action to contribute towards social solidarity as an expected outcome. However, Christens and Speer (2015) recommend being cautious, especially against the neoliberal discourse and appropriation of community organising, where community organising is seen as a possible substitute of the state for providing basic services. The authors differentiate both perspectives as, for them, “the purpose of organising is to alter community environments and contexts, so they are more responsive to the needs and values of people, whereas the purpose of service provision is to accommodate individuals to better function in and adapt to the circumstances they are confronting” (p.214). In other words, while organising to alter the social environment could eventually help to challenge the causes of poverty and inequality the subaltern face, organising only for the provision of services could arguably maintain the neoliberal structures of development, creating an obstacle for social change (Fisher and Shragge, 2000).

In that sense, the extant literature develops and differentiates two main approaches to community organising, namely social action and community development (Fisher and Kling, 1991; Fisher and Shragge, 2000; Staples, 2012; Christens and Speer, 2015; Staples, 2016). Social action organises ‘disadvantaged’ people to take direct action on their behalf through conflict strategies and tactics to pressure those in power in the struggle for social change and social justice (Fisher and Kling, 1991; Fisher and Shragge, 2000). In this context, while social change could imply the modification of government policies, achieving a role in community decision making, or shifting power or resources of communities and individuals (Pilisuk et al., 1996); social justice would suggest a commitment to fairness in the political, economic, and social realms (Weil, 2005). Consequently, social justice concerns institutions and processes that (re)produce practices of oppression and inequality and groups and organisations that aim to reshape these relations (Loyd, 2016). Therefore, organising for social justice would be rooted in collective processes that can improve the lives of marginalised groups of people through critical analysis, consciousness-raising, and social action (Staples, 2012).

Still, according to Devine (2005), the set of assumptions about subaltern groups organising to challenge unfair practices of oppression and inequality may also carry a massive burden of expectation for them. For the scholar, the marginalised could be more concerned with immediate relationships and linkages than with the broader political-economic context. In that sense, Devine (ibid.) suggests we are accustomed to thinking about ‘the impoverished’ in terms of material deprivation and seem to be less familiar with the idea of poverty as a reflection of poor relationships. The latter, the scholar argues, would be far more profound and debilitating to marginalised groups in terms of the vulnerability and hopelessness they could experience. These poor relationships and vulnerability that ‘the impoverished’ would experience relate to the second main community organising approach, namely community development. In opposition to the conflict strategies used in social action, this approach would be based on practices of political moderation where the focus of individuals is to build relationships in the neighbourhood. Thus, in community development, the community would develop partnerships with public and private stakeholders using consensus as the primary strategy to increase their quality of life. From this perspective, people will come together through a web of continuing relationships, and individuals will experience a sense of belonging to their community (Fisher and Shragge, 2000; Staples, 2016). Linking both approaches to community organising, Watkins (2017) explores what she considers ‘the ambivalent nature of community organisation’. In community organisation, she states, “existing local solidarities based on long-term shared interests and histories of conflict with the parts of the state, have been transformed (in theory) into social networks, forms of short-term instrumental cooperation based on consensus” (p.2148).

In this thesis, I assume that social action and community development approaches can complement rather than compete against each other. Communities can both enter into conflict and be collaborative with the state. They can work on service delivery and mobilise the community. The ability to do both will come from the openness of communities to this contradiction and the understanding that conflict and dissensus are central to the practice of organisations (DeFilippis et al. 2007). Along a similar line, drawing on her work on urban social movements, Mitlin (2018) identifies three strategies of collective resistance- namely contention, collaboration, and subversion- which are adopted simultaneously and iteratively. According to the scholar, contentious strategies would be conducted by organised groups or spontaneous movements engaging when specific patterns of political opportunities and constraints change, increasing pressure on elites, and focusing on the lack of governability. Collaboration strategies, in turn, would work through invited spaces, mainly involving the co-production of goods and services. Finally, subversive strategies would require a non-collective but prolonged direct action by individuals and families to acquire the basic needs of their lives. While Mitlin’s definition of contentious strategies could be closely related to the ideas of social action previously described in this chapter, collaboration strategies can arguably be linked to the notion of community development. As for subversive strategies, these would involve different, un-organised, and mainly individual sets of actions, as examined in the following subsection. For Mitlin (ibid.), the distinctions between these strategies would be artificial, as the three of them do coexist. The next subsection describes how these different forms of community organising have evolved and coexisted in the South African context.

*3.3.2 ‘Everyday resistance’ and ‘quiet encroachment’*

Braathen et al. (2014) affirm the recent history of community organising and activism in South Africa is rooted in the civics movement of the 1980s to contest the apartheid state. According to the scholars, protests began with campaigns against evictions and housing shortages during this period. They then evolved to mass mobilisations calling for the release of political prisoners and an end to racially-based government structures. After the return to democracy in 1994, the movement would have been weakened by the co-optation of its leadership and by its alliances with the state. More recently, the 2000s would have brought a rise in the number of social movements struggling to access socioeconomic rights, participating mainly through ‘service-delivery’ protests and resistance. In this context, protest and resistance strategies have included the construction of barricades, election boycotts, processions, and toyi-toying, a South African dance used in political protest that includes foot stamping (ibid). These actions have been described as ‘popcorn protests’, as they rapidly pop up and subside (Mottiar, 2013; 2019).

Some urban studies (Braathen et al. 2014) suggest that the tactics of local communities, and more specifically of informal settlements in the Global South, would eventually be more inclined to ‘everyday forms of resistance’ rather than social mobilisation and protests. The notion of ‘everyday resistance’ was first developed by Scott (1985) to describe not-formalised, disguised and quiet forms of organising that ‘subalterns’ use in their everyday lives mainly for primary survival purposes. In that sense, they would arguably favour individual strategies instead of collective action. Yet, the same characteristics of each particular community would make it very hard to conclude this as a general statement. Consequently, examining resistance practices from the subalterns reinforces the complexities of understanding power dynamics within an informal settlement in this research. According to Johansson and Vinthagen (2014), everyday resistance is a practice historically entangled with different power dynamics that is heterogeneous and contingent due to changing contexts and situations. For the scholars, everyday resistance involves specific strategies and tactics, as well as various relationships between actors (individuals as well as collectives) who can create different identities depending on the context and the role (dominant/subordinate) they have in the relationship, as further examined in the Analysis chapters.

Similarly, the notion of ‘quiet encroachment’ is marked by activities for basic survival without clear or structured organisation, but through the “pervasive advancement of the ordinary people on the propertied and powerful” (Bayat, 2000, p.545). The main goal of these practices would be to redistribute social goods and opportunities and attain autonomy from the state (Gillespie, 2017). Therefore, ‘Quiet encroachment’ would represent a cumulative effort of the subalterns to contest fundamental aspects of those in power, including the meaning of order and control of public space (Bayat, 2000). Arguably, ‘quiet encroachment’ would have similarities to what was previously described as ‘contention’ and ‘social action’, as it uses conflict strategies to pressure those in power in the struggle for social change. However, instead of organising through riots and demonstrations, ‘quiet encroachment’ acknowledges that the course of events is often contingent and unplanned.

Furthermore, Mottiar (2019) describes ‘quiet encroachment’ as an important modality through which ‘the urban poor’ in South Africa can also transform power relations towards their interests. As previously stated in this chapter, resistance has a long history in the country. During the apartheid era, expressions of resistance included work strikes, non-payment of service bills, and defiance of apartheid laws as part of the struggle for democracy and freedom. After the end of the apartheid, new resistance tactics of the subaltern include ‘illegal’ occupations of land and connection to water and electricity. According to Mottiar (ibid.), shack dwellers in urban areas would first ‘illegally’ occupy the land and then refuse to leave the place based on its ability to persist. When their shacks are demolished, they will simply build another one. When the local government denies them essential services, they will illegally connect to electricity and water facilities. Table 3C summarises the different approaches to community organising described in this last section.

*Table 3C: Approaches to community organising/ collective resistance*

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Approaches to community organising** | **Main characteristics** | **Scholars** |
| Social Action/ Community development | **Social action:** Organises ‘disadvantaged’ people to take direct action on their behalf through conflict strategies and tactics to pressure those in power in the struggle for social change and social justice**Community development:** Based on practices of political moderation where the focus of individuals is to build relationships in the neighbourhood. Thus, in community development, the community would develop partnerships with public and private stakeholders using consensus as the primary strategy to increase their quality of life. From this perspective, people will come together through a web of continuing relationships, and individuals will experience a sense of belonging to their community. | (Fisher and Kling, 1991; Fisher and Shragge, 2000; Staples, 2012; Christens and Speer, 2015; Staples, 2016). |
| Contention/ Collaboration/Subversion  | **Contentious strategies:** Conducted by organised groups or spontaneous movements engaging when specific patterns of political opportunities and constraints change, increasing pressure on elites, and focusing on the lack of governability. **Collaboration strategies:** Work through invited spaces, mainly involving the co-production of goods and services. **Subversive strategies:** Require a non-collective but prolonged direct action by individuals and families to acquire the basic needs of their lives. Involves different, un-organised, and mainly individual sets of actions. | (Mitlin, 2018) |
| Everyday resistance/ Quiet encroachment  |  **‘Everyday resistance’:** Not-formalised, disguised and quiet forms of organising that ‘subalterns’ use in their everyday lives mainly for primary survival purposes. They would arguably favour individual strategies instead of collective action.**‘Quiet encroachment’:** Activities for basic survival without clear or structured organisation, but through the persistent advancement of the ordinary people on the powerful. The main goal of these practices would be to redistribute social goods and opportunities and attain autonomy from the state. | (Scott, 1985; Bayat, 2000; Mottiar, 2013; Braathen et al. 2014; Johansson and Vinthagen, 2014) |

**3.4. Conclusion**

Chapter III explored the underlying assumptions and constructions of ideas of mainstream development studies on sustainability, civil society, and community organising. The main aim was to address the inherent complexities of the subalterns organising and how their multiple identities, overlapping positions, and shifting alliances go beyond fixed and mutually exclusive categories assumed in mainstream development studies. The chapter offered an alternative view of sustainability that understands economic, environmental, and social concerns as intersecting in the practices and perspectives of the subaltern in urban areas. In so doing, it highlighted the relevance of placed-based, process-oriented perspectives that understand social, economic, and environmental sustainabilities as integrated concepts. In the second section of this chapter, civil society was introduced as a relational space where diverse actors interact and are involved in multiple struggles over hegemonies. This thesis suggests that these hegemonies must be explored to understand how neoliberal ideas can be reproduced, re-constructed or contested in multiple ways and through various voices. In that sense, this chapter introduced the ‘power cube framework’ to address the different forms, levels, and spaces of power and hegemonies the subalterns might face in the context of an informal settlement. The chapter concluded by highlighting civil society organisations as dynamic entities that can change, acknowledging that collaborative, contentious, and subversive strategies coexist and that multiple identities and shifting alliances can all be part of the diverse politics of informal settlements in the Global South. The next chapter describes the methodology of this research.

**Chapter IV: Methodology**

This chapter discusses the philosophical assumptions and theoretical perspectives that guide my research. Informed by a relativist ontology and a social constructionist epistemology, this research takes an interpretivist approach, where realities are culturally derived and historically situated. In that sense, this investigation is based on qualitative research, to emphasise the description of context and processes and the relevance given to different understandings of research participants. Consequently, this work considers participatory action research (PAR) as its main strategy and orientation to inquiry to bring together theory and practice in participation with others. Yet the chapter describes how this strategy had to shift from an original emancipatory aim to a more participatory-oriented objective due to the Covid-19 outbreak amidst my fieldwork. This shift, in turn, explains why and how the research methods were adapted in response to measures introduced to control the spread of Covid-19, including social distancing and travel restrictions. Consequently, this chapter presents some innovative approaches developed to undertake participatory research from a distance.

This chapter is divided into five sections. The first section examines the philosophical assumptions underpinning this research: a relativist ontology, a constructivist epistemology, and an interpretivist approach. The second section identifies the research question, main aim, and objectives of this thesis. The third section examines PAR as the strategy used to conduct this work. It then discusses quality, validity, and ethics in PAR and its challenges in building relationships and sharing power between the researcher and the research participants. The fourth section reflects on my positionality as a researcher, examines the various stages involved in data production for this research, and describes the methods employed in each of them. The section concludes by explaining how the data was analysed. The fifth and last section presents the chapter’s conclusions.

**4.1 Research philosophy and assumptions**

The research philosophy taken in this thesis is informed by my assumptions about what exists in the world that we can acquire knowledge about (ontology) and how we can go about creating that knowledge (epistemology). According to Smith (2012, p.,48), ontology “is the science of what is, of the kinds and structures of objects, properties, events, processes and relations in every area of reality”. Likewise, for Hofweber (2016), ontology is the project of finding out what kind of things make up reality, what exists, or what there is. My research philosophy assumes a relativist ontology, which understands that there are multiple truths and facts that depend on the viewpoint of the observer (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). It acknowledges that the world is constituted, in varying degrees, by the mind; hence reality would have multiple, non-equivalent and irreducible ways of being (O’Grady, 2014). Consequently, this approach assumes that there is no fixed reality beyond the mental constructs that people have and share in a particular group or society.

The research follows an epistemology of social constructionism, which draws its influence from several disciplines, including philosophy, sociology, anthropology, and linguistics, making it multidisciplinary in nature. According to Burr (2015), social constructionism acknowledges a critical stance toward our taken-for-granted ways of understanding the world, including ourselves. For the scholar, in social constructionism, the categories and concepts we use to understand the world are historically and culturally specific. Besides, knowledge would be sustained by social processes; hence, our understanding of the world would come from how people construct it. Likewise, for Cunliffe (2008), social realities and ourselves would be intimately interwoven as each would shape and be shaped by the other in everyday interactions.

Yet, within social constructionism, there would lie a whole range of differences in its orientation, interests, and scope across the different fields of study mentioned above. According to Cunliffe (ibid.), the origins of social constructionism emerged from Berger and Luckman’s influential sociological book *The Social Construction of Reality* (1966), in which the scholars proposed that society exists both as an objective and subjective reality, arguing that our social world can be understood as a dialectical process of externalisation, objectivation, and internalisation. For Berger and Luckman, the social world would be humanly produced in ongoing activities and routines (externalisation) yet affecting our lives on an ongoing basis which we have to learn about (objectivation). Consequently, as we interpret meanings of events and other subjectivities, we would take on the world, the identity of others, and therefore our own place and identity (internalisation). And while Berger and Luckman’s book can be considered a starting point, since then, contemporary scholars would have offered an increasing body of work, drawing from a variety of disciplines, offering more nuanced interpretations of the epistemological underpinnings of social constructionism. Within organisation studies, such works have addressed a range of sociological-based studies grounded in ethnography, discursive approaches, and poststructuralist-influenced work, covering a variety of methods such as narrative analysis, discourse analysis, ethnography and autoethnography (Cunliffe, 2008). This thesis adopts Cunliffe’s relationally responsive social constructionism that “highlights the intersubjective, dialogical, and dialectical nature of experience, and consequently has implications for the type of knowledge we seek” (Cunliffe, 2008, p. 135). For the scholar, intersubjectivity relates to how we are interwoven with others but not necessarily understanding what each other thinks (as further addressed in the following subsection), and dialogical refers to how is it through dialogue that we shape our understandings of possible worlds. Consequently, a dialectical understanding would emphasise the contested nature of experience, tensions and dynamics of our social realities and identities, as further examined throughout the analysis chapters.

As in social constructionism, the definition of concepts includes the perspective of the different stakeholders; the observer is also part of what is being observed (Easterby-Smith et al. 2012). In that sense, the researcher cannot be neutral and should reflect not only on the values of the research participants but also on their values as part of a fundamental understanding of the reality being constructed. This absence of neutrality of the researcher has been criticised from positivist and pragmatic approaches, raising concerns about the possible lack of validity of the research (see section 4.3.2). However, through a social constructionist lens Aguinaldo (2004) argues validity “is premised upon the belief that research findings are always already partial and situated; that they actively construct the social world which is itself an interpretation and in need of interpretation” (p.128). For the scholar, validity would then be a social construction itself, which needs to be interrogated for its discursive function within the social sciences.

For Chambers (2012), to be reflexive, the researcher should reflect on personal attitudes, values, and belief systems and how these influence the way we interpret and experience different realities. Likewise, in this exercise of reflexivity, researchers would draw on the use of the self to generate insights, establish patterns, and bring the voice of their research subject to light (Venkatesh, 2012). According to Berger (2015, p.220), reflexivity is commonly viewed as “the process of a continual internal dialogue and critical self-evaluation of researcher’s positionality as well as active acknowledgement and explicit recognition that this position may affect the research process and outcome”. Consequently, interrogating the self, the data we employ and the different representations we use enables us to critically examine power dynamics in the research process (Sultana, 2007), as further examined in the following chapters. Closely related to reflexivity are considerations of positionality, a term used to describe an individual’s worldview, the position they adopt about a research task and its context, and how these affect the research outcomes and results (Holmes, 2020). Positionality is determined by where one stands in relation to ‘the other’ (Merriam et al., 2010). More importantly, these positions can shift. According to Schiffer (2020), positionality is based on fluid relationships and changes over time depending on who we engage with and to what end. In that sense, questions about reflexivity are also part of a broader debate about ontological and epistemological components of the self. In that sense, researchers would need to “increasingly focus on self-knowledge and sensitivity; better understand the role of the self in the creation of knowledge; carefully self-monitor the impact of their biases, beliefs, and personal experiences on their research; and maintain the balance between the personal and the universal” (Berger 2015, p.220). My positionality as a mixed-race male researcher coming from the Global South, working for a University of the Global North, and being introduced by a researcher from a local university who had worked in the informal settlement for more than five years, is further addressed in section 4.5.1.

The relativist ontology and social constructionist epistemology assumed in this research inform and guide the chosen approach towards my research topic. Consequently, this work considers an interpretivist approach, where realities are culturally derived and historically situated hence the participants of the informal settlement produce meanings, and those meanings are studied to create rich understandings and interpretations of their social world and context. In interpretivism, it is argued that “value-free data cannot be obtained, since the enquirers use their own preconceptions in order to guide the process of enquiry, and furthermore, the researcher interacts with the human subjects of the enquiry, changing the perceptions of both parties” (Chowdhury, 2014, p.433). In interpretivism, researchers go beyond what has occurred to see how it has occurred (Lin, 1998), contributing to the underlying pursuit of contextual depth (Myers and Avison, 2002). In the same vein, the approach to theory development in this research consists of an inductive process where the theory emerges from the data, and the aim is to increase the understanding of a particular situation (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). And while it is arguably not possible to conduct an exclusively inductive analysis (as the researcher would need some criteria to identify whether the data is conducive to addressing the research question), one approach does tend to prevail over the other (Byrne, 2021). In this case, a predominantly inductive approach was adopted. The following section identifies the research question, the main aim, and the objectives of this research.

**4.2 The research question, aim and objectives**

*4.2.1 Research question*

My research question problematises and addresses the gaps identified in the literature review. In so doing, it interacts with the philosophical and theoretical assumptions of this research, described in the previous sections.

The main research question is:

To what extent and how do power dynamics affect the organising of the subalterns in an informal settlement in South Africa?

The fundamental concepts of the research question are defined as follows:

**Power dynamics (see Chapter III)**

This thesis uses Gaventa’s power cube framework (2006) as a starting point to inform an in-depth and contextualised analysis of the power dynamics that may exist within the informal settlement being studied. The importance of the ‘power cube framework’ for this research rests on acknowledging a complex set of challenges that local communities may face if they expect to create social change. In the ‘power cube framework’, Gaventa examines three separate but interrelated dimensions of power: spaces of power, levels of power, and forms of power. The scholar describes the first dimension of his framework, spaces of power, as the opportunities and moments where the individuals (or the community) can influence policies and decisions that may affect their lives and interests. These spaces could be closed, invited, or claimed/ created. Also interrelated, levels of power represent the second dimension of his framework and are classified as global, national, and local (this thesis adapts those levels to national, local, neighbourhood, and household). The last dimension of the ‘power cube framework’, forms of power, is divided into visible, hidden, and invisible. This thesis also incorporates a power/interest grid (DfID, 2002; Mathur et al., 2007) to examine to what extent the involvement of the different stakeholders can affect Magangeni informal settlement organising. By combining this tool with the power cube framework, this research intends to address one of the problems attributed to Gaventa´s framework: understanding where the power comes from and how sources of power can be shifted or gained.

**Organising (see Chapter III)**

Organising in this research refers to the collective strategies and tactics the subaltern groups use to organise in the struggle for social justice and social change. These practices emerge mainly through conflict to pressure those in power, or through partnerships with private and public stakeholders using consensus as the primary strategy to increase their quality of life. This research also examines everyday resistance as not-formalised, disguised and quiet forms of organising that subaltern use in their everyday lives mainly for primary survival purposes (Scott, 1985). Everyday resistance involves specific strategies and tactics, as well as various relationships between actors (individuals as well as collectives) who can create different identities depending on the context and the role (dominant/subordinate) they have in the relationship (Johansson and Vinthagen, 2014). As opposed to organising through riots and demonstrations, everyday resistance understands that the course of events is often contingent and unplanned and that the subaltern can also resist through uncoordinated and direct action. This work assumes that all approaches can complement rather than compete against each other. The ability to do so will come from the openness of communities to this contradiction and to the understanding that conflict and dissensus are central to the practice of organisations (DeFilippis et al., 2007).

**The subalterns (see Chapter II)**

The origin of the term ‘subaltern’ is attributed to Gramsci’s work on cultural hegemony (1971). Gramsci explores how to overcome hegemony by, first, recognising the subaltern and then transforming the subaltern from a position of subordination to one of hegemony through the development of critical consciousness. In recent history, the subaltern would refer to “various forms of domination and marginality that were grounded in exclusion from the political economy of industrialised capitalism” (Bracke, 2016, p.845). In that sense, the subaltern would not just be “a classy word for oppressed, for ‘Other’, for someone who’s not getting a piece of the pie’” (Bracke, 2016, p.839). While the subaltern is oppressed, Spivak (2012) argues, not all the oppressed are subaltern. The difference would lie in how the oppressed relate to the dominant discourse.

**Informal settlements (see Chapter II)**

Acknowledging a place-based oriented approach, this thesis uses the South African definition of informal settlements. While the National Census characterise informal settlements in terms of the substandard building materials of the dwelling, the South African National Department of Human Settlements (NDHS) identifies informal settlements based on the following characteristics: illegal status of the occupied land; inappropriate locations; restricted public and private sector investment; poverty and vulnerability/lack of access to basic services; and the social stress under which the inhabitants live (HDA, 2013)

*4.2.2 Aim and objectives*

This research explores to what extent and how do power dynamics affect the organising of the subalterns in an informal settlement in South Africa. Through a participatory methodological approach (see section 4.3), its main aim is to contribute to new theoretical, conceptual, and empirical knowledge on the relationship between power dynamics, organisational practices of the subalterns, and social change, focusing on the following objectives:

1. To identify the forms, levels, and spaces of power within the informal settlement, examining to what extent these can alter or perpetuate the factors of subjugation subalterns face.
2. To explore the complexities of the subalterns organising in an informal settlement, addressing how their multiple and heterogeneous identities, overlapping positions, and shifting alliances go beyond fixed and mutually exclusive categories.
3. To address the organising of the subalterns and social sustainability as part of a broader debate on inclusion, social justice, and participation, challenging mainstream technocratic discourses.

**4.3. Methodology, ethics, and strategy**

This research is conducted through a purposive sample of a South African informal settlement in a determined context because of its relevance to the research question (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012); therefore, it does not intend to make claims concerning different units of analysis. However, it does expect to encourage further research using similar methodologies to understand different situations within their particular contexts. This section introduces participatory action research as the orientation (PAR) to inquiry adopted for this work. It explains my original aim of conducting PAR and how this idea had to be adapted and shifted because of the Covid-19 outbreak. The section then examines the notions of quality, validity, and ethics and some of the main challenges of the close relationship between researcher and participants in PAR. The last subsection incorporates elements of narrative inquiry contextualised within the broader PAR approach.

*4.3.1 Critical participatory action research and the shift from emancipation to participation*

This investigation is based on qualitative research. It captures the flexibility of qualitative methods, the emphasis on the description of context and processes, and the relevance given to different understandings of research participants (Bryman, 2016). In so doing, this work contemplates the use of participatory action research (PAR) as its main strategy. This subsection explores the main characteristics of PAR and how due to the Covid-19 outbreak amidst my fieldwork, I had to change the initial objectives of using PAR and the assumptions informing my research philosophy.

Reason and Bradbury (2008) define action research more as an ‘orientation to inquiry’ rather than a ‘methodology’ itself, that “brings together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and their communities” (p.4). In the same vein, for Zuber-Skerritt and Perry (2002), action research focuses on a group of people within an organisation or community who are all involved in the cycle of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. Accordingly, participation between the researcher and the participants would be expected to occur in all stages of the study, from clarifying the research focus, to undertaking fieldwork, and using data (Günbayi and Sorm, 2018). Whilst it is expected that the researcher brings theoretical knowledge to the investigation, the participants should contribute with the knowledge of the context in a process of mutual benefit and understanding (McKay and Marshall, 2001). Consequently, participatory action research (PAR) would address power imbalances and oppressive social structures by creating action as a catalyst for social change (Grant et al., 2008). Action research is thus an ongoing learning process that emphasises participation, organisational transformation, and co-learning (Greenwood et al. 1993).

In that sense, the initial commitment of this research was to examine the possibilities of emancipation of the subalterns in PAR, hence the interest in critical theory. The knowledge brought up by the participants in PAR is indeed an act of emancipation that has been linked to critical theory. Critical theory questions the hidden assumptions and purposes of existing knowledge and forms of practice that claim to be the only truth and reflect on the new possibilities for liberation (Brookfield, 1987). Hence critical theory offers not only a reflection on how things are but how they should or could be (Bronner, 2017). As explained in the previous chapters, how the truth is defined in MOS is conditioned by the predominance of Western interests, values, and cultural orientations. In that sense, this research intended to pay particular attention to the asymmetrical relations of power that take those assumptions and beliefs for granted. For Cassell and Johnson (2006, p.798), “critical theorists are concerned to engender critique of the status quo and simultaneously emancipate people from asymmetrical power relations, thereby enfranchising the usually marginalised, and promoting alternative forms of organisation”.

This emancipation relates to what Reason and Bradbury (2008) identify as the primary purpose of action research. According to the scholars, the primary purpose of action research should not be to produce theories about action or empirical knowledge to apply in action; but to liberate people “in the search for a better, freer world” (p.5). Similarly, Kemmis (2008) values the emancipatory aims of critical participatory (action) research in trying to release people “from constraints that narrow their lives and produce untoward consequences” (p.134). For the scholar, through critical participatory research, people would be more able to challenge unsustainable practices by confronting alienating and unjust ways of domination and oppression, and producing new knowledge, as examined in the previous chapters. The importance of examining participatory research through the lens of critical theory in this work resided on three main premises identified by Kemmis (ibid.). Firstly, the researcher could open space to create new knowledge through debate and dialogue with the participants of the informal settlement under study. Secondly, listening to the voice of those usually excluded would help them to build their future more sustainably. And thirdly, it recognises that realities are constructed through dialectical practices (individual/society, outsider/insider) that should all be considered and explicitly addressed to understand better the worlds and contexts being experienced by an informal settlement.

Yet, while this thesis planned to seek emancipatory ends for the subalterns, the original objective was hindered by the Covid-19 outbreak. In that sense, the pandemic affected data production and shifted from emancipatory to more participatory aims. The enforced separation from working with the research participants in the field led to a shift in my approach’s purpose. This shift was towards participation -amplifying the voices of the people less heard and increasing the accountability of those with relatively more power, as later examined in this chapter. Consequently, this unexpected shift and adaptation of my research explain the use and development of the methods and tools I went on to use. Their use was guided by my aims to continue and increase the participation of those with suppressed voices and amplify those voices through my research. This, in turn, explains how the PAR approach I started with changed to an approach where the Participatory part became more prominent than the Action part and where a relativist ontology and a social constructionist epistemology were used instead of a critical realist ontology.

*4.3.2 Quality, Validity and Ethics in PAR*

The close relationship between the researcher and participants in PAR -therefore the blurring of boundaries between researcher and researched- has led to questioning the validity, ethics, and quality of this approach in mainstream research (Baskerville and Wood-Harper, 1996). In that sense, this subsection highlights the relevance of all three notions and how they are addressed throughout this work.

One of my biggest challenges as a researcher was the desire to make participants full partners in the various stages of the research. According to Karnieli-Miller et al. (2009), this sometimes seems to contradict qualitative research's methodological and ethical promises. For the scholars (p.285), “The right of participants to play a significant role can lead to the denial of the researcher’s right to intellectual and academic freedom and to an oversimplification of the theoretical construct that can potentially emerge from the research. In the light of these constraints, qualitative research oscillates between the desire to offer a less hierarchical and more reciprocal, transparent framework and the need to respect the theoretical foundations, methodological discipline, and ethical boundaries of qualitative scholarship”. My research acknowledges the complexities of democratising the research process and changing the power relationships between researcher and participants. However, I intended to reduce these power imbalances (and my own epistemic violence) at the different stages of my research (see section 4.4).

For McTaggart (1998), the relationships between researcher and researched, knowledge and power, and research and social action that characterise PAR should invite us to reflect on the meaning of validity beyond a positivist approach to what is considered valid and measurable. Therefore, from an interpretative perspective, the scholar would reject the realist epistemology upon which the definition of validity appears to be based. In the same vein, Aguinaldo (2004) suggests conceiving validity no longer as a binary determination of what is valid or not but as a continual process of interrogation and reflection. Consequently, my work intends to change the question of whether the research is or not valid, to ‘what is the research valid for?’ As further addressed in this chapter, I intend to identify and interrogate the different variables and contradictions that might emerge from the continual reflection on any given research representation.

For Aguinaldo, “the goal of validation is not to determine, once and for all, if a representation serves a particular function, but rather to discover and anticipate how it ‘does’, ‘can’, or ‘might’, function to incite and foreclose, emancipate and oppress, and so forth when applied to different times and contexts and evaluated from different social locations” (ibid., p.134). Despite qualitative studies seek to describe, interpret, and understand rather than measure anything *per se*, for Feldman (2007, p.22) “because action research is ultimately concerned with the betterment of human situations, it requires a set of criteria that accurately tells us how well its outcomes lead to the improvement of those situations”. In that sense, researchers engaging in action research would need to demonstrate their work is well-grounded and can provide desired outcomes. Drawing on Feldman’s approach to demonstrate validity in action research, this thesis aimed to include a clear and detailed description of how and why data were collected, how the narratives were constructed from the data and how I constructed a narrative that intended to represent action research and its outcomes accurately.

Still, the questioning of mainstream literature regarding the ethics and quality of PAR has led Banks et al. (2013) to conclude that current institutional ethical review procedures in academia are not particularly well-suited to community-based participatory research. The scholars explore what they call ‘everyday ethics’ to study the daily practices of the researcher “not just as an impartial deliberator, but also as an embedded participant with situated and partial relationships, responsibilities, values and commitments that frame and constrain ways of seeing, judging and acting in particular situations” (ibid, p.266). Consequently, Reason (2006) argues that action research is characteristically full of choices; hence there will always be choices about what is important to attend at any particular moment. In that sense, quality in inquiry would come from awareness and transparency about the choices available at each stage of the inquiry. According to the scholar (ibid., p.199), “It is through understanding the choices that have been made, that judgements can be made about the nature of the knowledge and practice that has been generated”. For Reason, there would be no clear foundational grounds to know if the researcher’s choices are quality based. The best that researchers could do is offer their choices to their scrutiny, the mutual scrutiny of the co-researchers, and the wider community of inquirers. Consequently, quality would not rest on getting it right but on stimulating open discussion.

Likewise, Banks et al. (2013, p.274) affirm research ethics in community-based participatory research “need to acknowledge the dialectical tension between impartial principles and rules and the responsibilities that arise from relationships of trust and care and a commitment to working for a better world”. In that sense, as community-based participatory research frequently focuses on social justice outcomes, it is hard to believe the researcher will not commit to bringing about social change or can be neutral to the impact of the research. Consequently, the rigour and trustworthiness of this thesis respond to what Guba and Lincoln (1989, in Lincoln, 1995, p.277) defined as quality criteria “highly reflective of the commitment of inquiry to fairness (balance of stakeholder views), to the learning of respondents as much as to the learning of the researcher, to the open and democratic sharing of knowledge rather than the concentration of inquiry knowledge in the hands of a privileged elite, and to the fostering, stimulation, and enabling of social action”.

Furthermore, researchers should be particularly cautious when involving the “action” part of action research. For Duij et al. (2019), when participants in PAR experience powerlessness or lack of hope, inviting them to imagine how things could be, would not always seem to be the right response. In that sense, solely focusing on action and change might even be unethical, as it can lead to silencing acts in which powerlessness and suffering are denied. Consequently, this thesis aimed to contribute to a more ethical research practice by at least making this complexity visible in the context of an informal settlement. The following subsection examines two of the main challenges described in PAR literature: building relationships and power-sharing with the research participants.

*4.3.3 Challenges of PAR: building relationships and power-sharing*

The participatory approach and co-production of knowledge adopted in this thesis share the commitment to reform research practices through strengthening the voice of disadvantaged communities (Mitlin et al., 2019), actively involving a range of community stakeholders, and sharing power for the benefit of all participants (Banks et al., 2013). Therefore, doing participatory research in communities will bring practical challenges, such as working across cultures in a different language or accessing socially marginalised or dispossessed people (Lunn, 2014).

According to Grant et al. (2008), some of the main challenges described in PAR literature are building relationships and sharing power and knowledge with the participants. For the scholars, the challenges of building relationships may include the community mistrust of outside researchers and the inadequate preparation and training of researchers. Likewise, regarding sharing power, the challenges would include the fact that the researcher is generally in a position of power in relation to community members and that the researcher may be reluctant to acknowledge privilege and share power. As an outsider researcher, I needed to gain the trust of the informal settlement community members and determine whether my proposed research subject was relevant and interesting to the informal settlement. There was also a risk that the participants could identify me as a white man, which represents a historically oppressive group in South Africa. Hence, I aimed to introduce myself to the community with a humble attitude, reflecting on my own biases and privilege and being willing to listen and continually learn from the participants of the informal settlement (Minkler, 2004). At the same time, I approached the participants with transparency and clarity about my position and their expectations as a first step in ‘negotiating’ the research process. It was also beneficial to work collectively with black and white female South African researchers at the UTFS. Especially in strongly racialised intellectual and academic contexts like South Africa, where “intellectual and academic life continues to be structured along racial and gender lines” (Hlatshwayo, 2015, p.143). I also knew these researchers worked for several years in Magangeni informal settlement (see section 4.5). Working with them helped reduce potential upset, as the people who live in the informal settlement already knew them, their background, and their research. These researchers supported the informal settlement when communicating their concerns on different issues to the university and the local authorities.

However, I understood that the power inequities within the research relationship could not be eliminated but only reduced through processes of PAR (Grant et al., 2008). Given the power relationships between researchers and participants in PAR, Montero-Sieburth (2020) challenges the assumption that researchers can ‘give voice’ to the subalterns and advances on the idea that researchers need to uncover their own voice in the research process before uncovering the voices of the participants. According to the scholar, this requires ‘cultural humility’, namely the commitment to ongoing self-reflection and self-critique to redress power imbalances and develop non-paternalistic, mutually beneficial, and supportive relationships with the participants. In that sense, Montero-Sieburth suggests that researchers would not be able to ‘give voice’, “but have the empathy and skills to uncover the voice that is present in the lives of the participants and collaboratively make it evident as well as useful for change” (ibid., p.217). Consequently, rather than ‘giving voice’ or ‘empowering’ participants, this thesis aimed to uncover my voice in the research process through dialogue, interaction, and reflection with the participants.

Similarly, based on the work of Freire (1970) with oppressed populations, Oakley et al. (2020, p.102) suggest “this calls for a decolonising research process that situates subaltern sensibilities at the epicentre, driving and producing research that speaks to the specificities of their subalternity”. Furthermore, for Mitlin et al. (2019, p.9) “knowledge that is co-produced engages with alternative understandings, builds new research capabilities, jointly tests different explanations, and negotiates research processes”. For Grant et al. (2008), sharing knowledge with the participants is a way to recognise and value different sources of knowledge, skills, and resources, moving from a traditional power dynamic research/researched to a co-construction of knowledge. Another possible strategy of power-sharing is ensuring part of the research budget to benefit the participants and the community (ibid.). As further explained in this chapter, after the Covid-19 pandemic interrupted my fieldwork, the second stage of data gathering included this participatory approach where community members were employed as co-researchers and provided with IT resources.

The following subsection introduces narrative inquiry examining how some of its elements were included in this research to produce and analyse the data within a participatory action research approach.

*4.3.4 Narrative inquiry within PAR*

This work uses elements of narrative inquiry to produce and analyse the data within the broader Participatory Action Research approach. For Rhodes and Brown (2005), through narrative sensemaking and discursive action, experience can be reflexively reconstituted, made meaningful, and communicable. The scholars suggest that narrative does not have a single story but networks of stories that evolve as the temporal context changes. Complementing Rhodes and Brown’s definitions, Lessard et al. (2018) suggest that “while both holding a particular narrative view of experience and attending to experience through the living and telling of stories are important, it is essential that [in narrative inquiry] we inquire into experiences, into the living and telling of stories, and into stories as lived and told”. Thus, narrative inquiry would be much more than just telling stories. Narrative inquiry would also be about reflecting on, inquiring, and disrupting common understandings, perceptions, and practices (Lessard et al., 2018). In that sense, the focus of narrative inquiry would be not only on individuals’ experiences but also on the social, cultural, and institutional narratives within which those individuals’ experiences are shaped, expressed, and enacted (Clandinin and Rosiek, 2019).

The earliest explicit uses of narrative inquiry informing management and organisation theory would date from the 1970s (Rhodes and Brown, 2005). Often located within a social constructivist framework (storying lives, relationships, and experiences), more recently it would have been recognised not only as a form of data, but also as a theoretical lens, a methodological approach, and a set of combinations of these. In that sense, McNiff (2007) examines the links between narrative inquiry and action research. According to the scholar, narrative enables researchers to tell how they have taken action to improve specific situations and how, and to what extent, reflecting on these actions has led to new learning. Thus, researcher and participants are viewed as co-constructions that participate in on-going processes of research in action and in which “the location of a narrative in a specific place allows us not only to frame its meaning but also to highlight its singularity” (Toledano and Anderson, 2020, p.309). Moreover, narrative inquiry would also constitute an invitation to the participants to select what they consider relevant for their own understanding, allowing any events or circumstances that at the beginning of the research did not seem relevant to become significant as they are talked about and analysed among participants (Toledano and Anderson, 2020). Consequently, this thesis acknowledges the relevance of disrupting conventional understandings by collectively inquiring (together with the participants and the co-researchers) the stories being told. In that sense, this research also understands that stories can change, as well as the identities and interpretations of the participants that are contingent on the settings and different situations experienced in the informal settlement, as addressed in my previous chapters.

Based on the gaps identified in the literature review and this research's theoretical assumptions and philosophy, this section introduced the research question, aim, and objectives of this thesis. Using a qualitative methodology and participatory action research (PAR) as its main strategy, the section also examined how the original aim of conducting PAR had to be adapted and shifted because of the Covid-19 outbreak. A special subsection was included to discuss quality, validity, and ethics in PAR and its consequent challenges due to the close relationship between researcher and participants. A final subsection reflected on the importance of including elements of narrative inquiry in the PAR approach. The following section reflects on my positionality as a researcher. It then describes the various stages involved in data production for this research and the methods employed in each of them. The section concludes by explaining how the data was analysed.

**4.4 Fieldwork and data production**

To produce the data, Creswell (2002) suggests action research should include at least one of the three 'E's': 'experiencing', wherein the researcher draws on their own involvement; 'enquiring', wherein the researcher collects new information in different ways; and 'examining', wherein the researcher uses records such as archival documents and journals. This work intended to address ‘enquiring’ and ‘experiencing’ through various methods, namely *semi-structured (face-to-face and phone-call) interviews*, *participant observation* (*personal diary)*, *stakeholders* *mapping*, *narrative-* *photovoice* and *focus groups* (described in order in the following subsections), to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the informal settlement under study. In the following sub-sections, I first reflect on my positionality as a researcher and then describe the various stages involved in data production for this research and the methods employed in each of them (*see Table 4A Methods Summary Table)*. The first stage describes the methods used in the field before the Covid-19 outbreak (face-to-face interviews, participant observation, and stakeholders’ mapping). The second stage describes the methods used to produce data under lockdown while still in South Africa. The third and last stage describes the methods conducted by the co-researchers after I returned to the UK (face-to-face interviews, narrative-photovoice, and focus groups). Consequently, the subsections explain how the research methods were adapted in response to measures introduced to control the spread of the Covid-19 virus, including social distancing and travel restrictions. In so doing, this research presents innovative approaches developed to undertake participatory research from a distance.

*Table 4A: Methods Summary Table*

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Method** | **My Location** | **Numbers** | **Co-researchers** | **Stage of Data Production** |
| ***Face-to-face semi-structured interviews*** | In the field(South Africa) | 18 interviewees | 0 | **I** **(January - Mid-March 2020)** |
| ***Participant observation*** | More than 120 pages in a personal diary. | 0 |
| ***Stakeholders Mapping*** | N/A | *\* The exercise of mapping the different actors involved in Magangeni was collectively constructed with academics of UTFS, one of the co-researchers, a member of the sub-ward committee of Magangeni, and a representative of Langutani municipality[[4]](#footnote-4).* |
| ***Phone-call semi-structured interviews*** | In the field (South Africa- under lockdown restrictions) | 10 interviewees | 1 | **II** **(Mid-March - May 2020)** |
| ***Face-to-face semi-structured interviews*** | In the UK | 9 interviews | 3 | **III** **(June 2020- February 2021)** |
| ***Narrative photo-voice*** | A total of 30 photographs captured (15 of which were described and analysed). | 3 |
| ***Focus groups*** | 3 focus groups (6 participants each) | 3 |

*4.4.1 My positionality*

Data production was divided into three stages between January 2020 and February 2021. However, its origins date from June 2019 when I met an academic of a South African university (UTFS), presenting my work at a conference in Johannesburg. She told me she worked with colleagues for more than a decade in various informal settlements in another South African city[[5]](#footnote-5) and invited me to meet them. After several meetings with her colleagues, I was offered a visiting scholar position at UTFS starting in January 2020. As a visiting scholar, I would be given access to the University's premises and was invited to attend scheduled research activities during my expected five-month fieldwork (having an office and attending seminars and workshops). In return, I committed to sharing the findings of my research with the faculty once I concluded my work. The possibility of being located at UTFS would also allow me to learn from the vast experience of their academics about civil society in South Africa. More particularly, I would learn from their knowledge of, and research in Magangeni informal settlement, which we all agreed was the most suitable place to conduct my research as it is considered accessible and wouldn’t pose an issue for my personal security, and because of the informal organisation within the community.

Throughout my research, I aimed to engage in continuous self-reflection of how my experiences and identity could shape the research, considering both my position of power and the ways to share it. By doing this self-reflection exercise, I intended to ensure rigour in the process sensitively and enrich the analysis of the data gathered and written up. The following subsections examine my relationship with UTFS and Magangeni participants.

*4.4.1.1 My relationship with UTFS*

It was only one week after I arrived in South Africa that the students of UTFS went on strike, demanding that the University fees fall in price. Buildings and cars were set alight during the protest, and police officers were present across the university campus. University buildings had to close, and I was asked to work from home until the strikes were over. Simultaneously, the Government was implementing a policy of load-shedding with power cuts between 2 and 6 hours every day, affecting the time I had to continue my work from home. Two weeks later, I resumed working at the office I was allocated at the UFSM campus. As my office was next to other researchers' offices, I met them and we discussed our respective research interests. When I expressed my intentions of visiting Magangeni, I was asked to talk to one of the academics conducting her work for more than five years in that settlement. I had met her on my previous visit to South Africa, and she would be the one introducing me to the dwellers. When we met again, I told her that my research's main objective was to explore the different power dynamics involved in the informal settlement. I explained that the study might also include her relationship with the dwellers and the apparent dependency that Magangeni had built on her. She understood and accepted her role as an intermediary between the settlement and the authorities and the ways her experience and even her ‘whiteness’ might have helped Magangeni sit at the table of decision-making. I also understood that her position of power would also help me gain access to Magangeni and, most importantly, the trust of the different stakeholders involved in the informal settlement. In that sense, she was the one in charge of introducing me to most research participants.

She also told me it was not a good moment to visit Magangeni the week we met. A team of UTFS researchers had a bad experience that same week in another informal settlement in the area. She explained that they had visited the place without asking for a meeting. When they arrived, they were exposed and threatened. At one point, someone opened fire, gunshots were heard, and the researchers had to go to the floor to avoid risks. Luckily, a settler recognised them and took them to a safer area. Hence for security reasons, I was asked first to meet with Magangeni dwellers at UTFS. After being introduced to them, they told me it would be a good moment to visit the place. After three weeks in South Africa, two representatives of the Magangeni area committee visited UTFS to meet with me. For safety reasons, they recommended that I visit Magangeni with one of them- both females- and with another male dweller. They suggested the name of someone who was not part of the area committee but had previously volunteered for the Magangeni research group and could also act as my interpreter. For my first visit to the informal settlement, I was also accompanied by a UTFS researcher.

*4.4.1.2 My relationship with the participants of Magangeni*

Being a mixed-race male researcher from a university in the Global North conditioned the power dynamics and interactions I had with the research participants. But it was mainly being introduced as a visiting scholar of UTFS that helped me position myself as a credible researcher the participants could trust. There was an ongoing relationship between UTFS and the informal settlement that had started in 2014. In the end, this position of power allowed me to conduct most of my research. After being introduced by the UTFS researcher, the Magangeni research group members made me feel like one of them. “*If you are with her, you are with us*”, once told one of the participants. Another one used to call me ‘*my son*’. They all reassured me that I would be safe with them when visiting the place. Because of the established relationship between Magangeni and UTFS researchers and the trust this association generates, I was given authorisation by the chairperson of Magangeni to conduct my research in the informal settlement without much need to justify anything else. Each time I visited the place, I was accompanied by an interpreter who had lived in Magangeni for more than ten years and was well known by most settlers. The interpreter first walked with me through the four different sections of Magangeni, showing me the shacks conditions and introducing me to some of his neighbours.

Being a male born in the Global South and having lived in another informal settlement of South Africa before also helped me strengthen our bonds. We could talk about anything and everything at any given time. Sometimes we would talk about my experience as the only mixed-race person living in a deprived rural village in the Northeast. Sometimes, we would find ourselves talking about his family or even about the national football league. During our first conversations, he explained how they illegally connected to electricity and water and the challenges they faced because of those illegal connections. He also showed me the houses next to the river and the consequences of floods in the settlement. When people asked him who I was in his local language, he would reply that I was a friend of UTFS wanting to know how they lived and organised in the informal settlement. He will sometimes receive some jokes asking him if he was paid for working as a tour guide. For language barriers, only some of the dwellers could fluently communicate with me, being the interpreter one of them. This situation arguably positioned him in a power relationship compared to his other neighbours (who could not speak English) and me (who could not understand the local languages). Whilst I did not pay the interpreter as a tour guide, the arrangements were that he would receive a payment for the interpretation work (funded through my research fund). Yet his role eventually would change amidst the Covid-19 outbreak (as further examined in this chapter). The Government announced a national lockdown, and UTFS closed the campus and asked the academics and researchers to cancel all fieldwork in the area. We both knew that keeping social distancing in an informal settlement would be challenging. Still, we decided to resume our research only after the country eased its restrictions. By then, I provided him with a smartphone to help me conduct phone call interviews. Later, we would add other two co-researchers to the investigation (see section 4.5.4).

Once I returned to the UK, we created a WhatsApp group with the three co-researchers, with whom we would discuss the following stages of the research. In the beginning, it was me explaining to them the methods we would follow to produce the rest of the data and agree on the terms and conditions of their work and pay. But after a few conversations, they became more and more proactive and engaged. For instance, they started making suggestions and identifying themes that, from the interviews they had conducted, appeared to be relevant and salient, for my research and for the research participants. At this moment, their role shifted from merely helping to conduct interviews to being co-designers and responsible for implementing new methods of data production for this investigation. The topics they raised and their role in co-producing data for this research are further examined in the following sub-sections of this chapter. In conclusion, being a mixed-race male researcher from a university in the Global North did condition the power dynamics and interactions I had with the research participants. However, the main factor in gaining the participants' trust was being introduced by the UTFS lead researcher. While the gender variable was partly important (mainly for safety reasons), being born in the Global South and having lived in South Africa also helped me build a better rapport, especially with the co-researchers For Berger (2015), the degree of the researcher’s personal familiarity with the experience of research participants can potentially impact all phases of the research process, enabling better in-depth understanding of perception and interpretation of their lived experiences and enhancing the collaborative nature of knowledge produced by ‘levelling the ground’ between the researcher and the participants. Yet Berger (ibid.) also recommends that the researcher should remain constantly alert to avoid projecting their own experiences and using them as the lens to view and understand participants’ experiences (see discussion in section 4.1.1).

In the following subsections, I describe the various stages involved in data production for this research and the methods employed in each of them. The first stage describes the methods used in the field before the Covid-19 outbreak. The second stage describes the methods used to produce data under lockdown while still in South Africa. The third and last stage describes the methods conducted by the co-researchers after I returned to the UK.

*4.4.2 The first of three stages of data production*

The first stage of my data production started when I arrived in South Africa in late-January 2020 for what was expected to be 5-month fieldwork. This early stage included semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and mapping of various stakeholders involved in the informal settlement. While the first two methods were part of the original plan, the latter emerged from informal conversations about the issues the participants themselves experienced and prioritised. This subsection explains how the three different methods were conducted for this research.

During the first two weeks of February, I was not allowed to settle in my office at UTFS, as students were striking and protesting against school fees (see the previous sub-section). However, I visited Magangeni's informal settlement with an academic of UTFS. She introduced me to three representatives of the sub-ward committee of Magangeni and to one dweller who was not part of the sub-ward committee- but who had previously worked with her. She also suggested that the latter could be my language interpreter during data production, as most participants speak Xhosa or Zulu. My first conversations (with the interpreter's help) were with those three leaders of the sub-ward committee. This exercise arguably gave more legitimacy to my research, as the sub-ward committee leaders have been chosen and recognised by the rest of the people who live in Magangeni to be representatives who act on their behalf. The conversations with the participants included the main topics I expected to address during my research, namely their organisational practices and strategies and how they understood and addressed sustainability and social change. In the following pages, I first explain how interviews were conceptualised and conducted, and then I will focus on the other methods employed during this first phase (namely, participant observation, diaries, and mapping).

**Face-to-face interviews**

For this research, I planned semi-structured interviews to obtain data using a flexible and open method of 'enquiring' the participants to elaborate upon existing knowledge and create new knowledge (Bryman, 2016). Using a face-to-face interview method would allow me to collect richer and deeper data from verbal and non-verbal communication. Besides, it also aimed to be coherent with the research philosophy and assumptions described at the beginning of this chapter, highlighting the intersubjective and dialogical nature of Cunliffe’s relationally responsive social constructionism (see section 4.1). On the other hand, participant observation would complement the idea of generating data from semi-structured interviews. Observing as a participant provides a situation in which the meaning of words can be understood in context, exploring various interviews, and observing their implications and nuances (ibid.).

Before identifying potential participants within Magangeni, I asked the sub-ward committee leaders for formal consent for the informal settlement to take part in the study and for the dwellers to participate in an interview with me. I used two information sheets (both translated to Zulu and Xhosa language by the interpreter). The first one provided the information that the sub-ward committee representatives needed to know to decide if they agreed to me carrying out participant observation in the place during my fieldwork. The second sheet was written for each dweller of the informal settlement to explain the interview stage of the research. After one month of my arrival and being provided with the sub-ward committee leaders' consent, I started visiting the place on my own. With the help of the interpreter, I met other dwellers and started having informal conversations with them. During our discussions, I was also able to inform the participants about the research and answer their questions. This process of fully informing potential participants and being introduced by the academic of UTFS, who was well-known by most of the sub-ward committee members, helped me build their trust in the study and establish a rapport. I could then start conducting my first semi-structured interviews.

I adopted purposive, snowball sampling to select the interviewees, identifying participants based on their particular experiences or perspectives. Before each interview, I provided all the potential participants with an information sheet to read. Time was given for the participants to consider if they wished to participate or not and for me to answer any questions they might have. This information sheet included why they were invited to participate, what would be involved if they chose to participate, their rights as participants, and details of how I intended to use and store the information they provided. As I regularly visited the place, the participants could speak with me and ask me any questions. I acknowledge that taking part in action research and being interviewed could produce a low level of psychological distress to participants. While the topics to be discussed related mainly to organisational practices and the personal views and opinions of the interviewees on the organisation, social change, and sustainability, there was a possibility that participants might recall some unpleasant personal experiences. When this was the case, the participants were reminded that their views and perceptions as co-designers of this research were most relevant and were not obliged to share sensitive matters they found upsetting. Each interview took between 45 to 60 minutes. I was aware of the time constraints that some of them could face and the language barriers I would have with a vast majority of the participants, but I did not want to make some of them feel excluded because of not being considered in the research. In that sense, I tried to include both male and female participants from the four different areas of the informal settlement.

At the end of each interview, I invited the participants to suggest any other dwellers who lived in the four different informal settlement sections who might be interested in taking part in an interview with me. This process was intended to continue until I had interviewed up to 15 members of the sub-ward committee and 15 dwellers of the informal settlement who did not participate in the sub-ward committee. While hard to determine sample size in qualitative research, a priori, recommendations for single studies using an inductive approach in the literature vary from 4 to 30 (Sim et al., 2018). At the same time, data saturation is expected to be achieved after 10 to 20 interviews (ibid.). However, as this section explains, I had to interrupt the data production after completing 15 interviews only (considering members and non-members of the sub-ward committee).

**Participant Observation**

As examined in section 4.1, my research assumes a relativist ontology that understands that there are multiple truths and facts that depend on the viewpoint of the observer (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012). Therefore, I aimed to permanently reflect on my personal attitudes, values, and belief systems in this research and how these could influence my relationship with the research participants and their settings. In so doing, I aimed to generate insights and establish patterns through both participant observation and reflections in a personal diary.

Between February and mid-March, I 'experienced' observation as a participant in the informal settlement. The extant literature identifies that a participant observer can assume the role of complete participant; complete observer; the observer-as-participant; and the participant-as-observer (Takyi, 2015). For this research, I followed the latter participant-as-observer role. The participant-as-observer role offers a degree of separation between the researcher and the observed environment, enabling me as the researcher to join in activities I chose, but without making them compulsory (Manolchev and Foley, 2021). In the participant-as-observer role, the researcher's intention is to experience the lives of the participants to understand them better, getting a deeper insight into the context being studied. As a participant-as-observer, the researcher adopts both the participant and observer roles. Consequently, the researcher participates in the research setting and disclose the observational objectives to the participants, “making it known that the development and cultivation of relationships with participants is for the purposes of research” (Brannan and Oultram, 2012, p.298). Besides, in this role, “close contacts with informants help the researcher to understand, in practical terms, nuances in their discourses, which cannot be obtained through one-visit interviews” (Takyi, 2015, p. 868). I took this stance for several reasons: to experience the life of the participants and to understand them better through close interactions, to access and build more in-depth insights into the context being studied, and to allow me to reveal my identity to the participants. Through the role of participant-as-observer, I visited Magangeni two or three times per week, every week, to be familiarised with the informal settlement, the place where they live, and the spaces they use for meeting purposes. Visiting the informal settlement also allowed me to build rapport, observe the people living in the place, and have informal conversations to analyse better the forms, levels, and spaces of power within the informal settlement. Whilst some may question the 'objectivity' to produce evidence from participant observation, from an interpretivist perspective, there is no such thing as a dichotomy between interpretations and evidence, as the act of identifying the latter is itself an interpretation (Schwandt et al. 2007). Besides, the idea of understanding interpretations in a particular context of shared beliefs defines interpreting not as an individual cognitive act but more as a social and political practice.

**Personal diary**

During this period, I took notes on Magangeni's organisational practices and power dynamics observations in a personal diary. Diaries are used from very different theoretical and epistemological frameworks and can collect qualitative and quantitative data in isolation or mixed-method approaches (Harvey, 2011). Among its benefits, diaries permit the examination of reported events and experiences in their natural, spontaneous context, complementing the information obtainable by other methods and minimising the amount of time elapsed between an experience and the account of this experience. (Bolger et al., 2003). In research methods, diaries are considered a way to both record decisions during the data collection process and as a vehicle for documenting personal reflections (Silverman, 2005). In addition, Browne (2013) suggests research diaries are an opportunity for researchers to be open about their personal transformation during the fieldwork process. This, in turn, would relate to the continuous exercise of personal reflection and co-learning that takes place in PAR, as previously described in this chapter. By mid-March, I had written more than 60 pages in my diary[[6]](#footnote-6). The account focused on describing and reflecting on the various forms, levels, and spaces of power experienced between the South African university and me as a visiting scholar; the university academics and the dwellers of Magangeni; the research participants of Magangeni; and between the research participants and me during my fieldwork. This period of interactions helped me have plenty of informal conversations with various participants in the settlement. During these conversations, the participants shared their experiences and identified what they considered the most relevant organisational problems in the informal settlement. Consequently, the diary included personal reflections on re-framing theories and concepts, re-considering the relevance of specific topics related to organising, and adapting them to the particular context of Magangeni informal settlement, as further described in the following sections.

**Stakeholders’ mapping**

An issue that repeatedly emerged throughout various discussions with the participants to better understand the power dynamics within Magangeni organising was their need to map the multiple stakeholders involved in Magangeni and identify the existent interventions in the informal settlement. Aligned with the objectives of PAR, this thesis aimed to involve the research participants in the different cycles of the research process, emphasising participation and co-learning. In so doing, it aimed to amplify the voices of the people less heard (the subalterns) and increase the accountability of those with relatively more power (see section 4.3.1). The role of other actors such as NGOs, UTFS, and Langutani Municipality, and the power dynamics experienced with them, seemed all relevant to the Magangeni dwellers to understand how the informal settlement negotiated and organised for social change. According to Mathur (2007), extant literature describes four different techniques for identifying stakeholders. These are using a generic list, asking a set of questions, using snowballing techniques and stakeholder mapping. While the first three would be primarily oriented towards identifying stakeholders, the latter would serve a more strategic purpose in understanding their engagement levels. Hence, I met several times with the academics of UTFS and the interpreter of Magangeni. They all suggested I contact different sub-ward committee members and an Langutani Municipality representative to identify and list the various projects taking place (or that had recently taken place) in Magangeni. During the first two weeks of March, I conducted three different face-to-face semi-structured interviews. The first interview was with one representative of Langutani Municipality, the second one with a representative of an NGO implementing a project in the informal settlement, and the third one with a representative of another NGO that have previously implemented a project in Magangeni.

As further explained in the Analysis Chapter, after the research participants identified the stakeholders, I then plotted them on a grid with two key attributes of stakeholders as its axes: power and interest. Depending on their levels of power and interest I attributed them (based on my own reflections and analysis of the data), the stakeholders were grouped into those with low interest and little power, those with low interest but great power, those with high interest but little power, or those with high interest and high levels of power. This power/interest matrix has been described as very useful for sustainability assessments for two different reasons. “Firstly, it can help identify power imbalances between the different stakeholders and prepare strategies to address this… (And) Secondly, mapping stakeholders relative to their level of interest (for example, as against their importance, readiness, or priority) provides an opportunity to bring those stakeholders within the assessment process who might otherwise be left out and might precisely be the ones who could oppose the project if not involved" (Mathur, 2007, p.12). Consequently, addressing the power/interest matrix related to at least two of the three of the main objectives of this research, namely identifying the various forms, levels, and spaces of power within Magangeni, and exploring the complexities of the shifting alliances of the subalterns in an informal settlement (see section 4.2.2).

The five-month fieldwork was considered a long enough period to have sufficient exposure to a range of day-to-day organisational activities for my participant observation analysis and conducting the semi-structured interviews planned. Unfortunately, in mid-March, the President of South Africa announced a strict lockdown to control the spread of the Covid-19 virus, including social distancing and travel restrictions. The measures were to be adopted immediately and for an indefinite period. After only a month and a half in the country, the fieldwork plan had to change. There were no flights available to go back to the UK, and I could not revisit the informal settlement either UTFS, as I could not leave home. All sub-ward committee meetings and NGO interventions also had to stop during the lockdown.

*4.4.3 Stage Two: the interpreter as a co-researcher*

The second stage of data production considers the period between mid-March and the end of May 2020. During this time, I had to readapt my research, shifting from face-to-face to phone-call interviews and asking my interpreter to participate as a co-researcher. This adaptation was planned to overcome the limitations of a national lockdown and keep my action research's participatory approach. After re-submitting my ethics form to the University of Sheffield (and while still in South Africa), I was still missing 15 interviews from the original plan. In that sense, I agreed with the interpreter that I would call, and audio record the interviews with those dwellers who spoke English, and he would call and interview participants who speak Zulu or Xhosa. He would first translate and make handwritten notes of the answers to the interview questions and then take a photograph of the notes sending a copy of the image to me via WhatsApp. I provided the interpreter with a smartphone for him to conduct the interviews. However, not all dwellers have their own telephones or access to one. Besides, some of them left Magangeni to stay with their families in rural areas during the lockdown, and due to poor connectivity, it was impossible to contact them. Still, we completed ten more interviews with people who remained living at the settlement.

**Phone-call interviews**

The telephone interview is a cost-effective and flexible method of data collection. However, it might generate greater difficulty in achieving rapport with the interviewees because of the lack of visual cues to interpret the answers. It may also produce shorter responses than face-to-face interviews, with 20-30 minutes considered before the maximum before respondent fatigue sets in (Carr and Worth, 2001). Conversely, Farooq and De Villiers (2017) counterargument that qualitative telephone interviews have many advantages, such as being less time-consuming, less intrusive, and potentially increasing the likelihood of participation. Phone interviews would also be easier to reschedule, and therefore potential participants may be more willing to agree to participate in the research. However, according to the scholars (ibid.), previous studies suggest the researcher should evaluate (before planning the phone-call interviews) the experience and level of comfort of the participants using the telephone and their own experience and confidence as a researcher using the telephone for research purposes. Besides, they recommend that the researcher supplement the phone research interview with observations or other data collection methods. As examined throughout this section, phone-call interviews were only one of the several methods contemplated for producing data in this research. After two months under lockdown restrictions and a total of four months in South Africa, I was able to take a repatriation flight back to the UK with 28 completed interviews (considering face-to-face and phone-call interviews) and more than 100 pages written in my diary.

*4.4.4 Stage Three: a team of co-researchers led from abroad*

*4.4.4.1 The remaining interviews*

The third and last stage of the data production started when I arrived back in the UK in June 2020 and lasted until mid-February 2021. After leaving South Africa, I still had interviewees I could not contact during my fieldwork and relevant data that I could not collect. As further described in this section, the third stage included semi-structured interviews, photovoice-narrative, and focus groups. These methods were coordinated by me and conducted by a team of co-researchers who live in Magangeni.

To keep the participatory research approach during this stage, I applied to the University for additional funding to help make the necessary adaptions to my research. I was allocated funds to invite three Magangeni informal settlement participants to work as my co-researchers. The first co-researcher was my interpreter during the fieldwork, as we have built a good working relationship. The other two co-researchers actively engaged with the research during my fieldwork and were also chosen to encourage women’s participation, as gender inequality was identified by the participants as one of the main problems in the informal settlement (see Chapter VI). One of the co-researchers was part of the sub-ward committee of Magangeni, and the other two co-researchers were not. Two of them had previously volunteered in a research project of UTFS, and they all speak English, which made it easier to communicate and coordinate with me. The three would oversee conducting the last few semi-structured interviews in South Africa, following the same set of questions I have prepared for the 25 interviews undertaken already.

The lockdown restrictions in South Africa were partially eased in September 2020. By then, I provided two co-researchers with a basic smartphone (the other co-researcher, the interpreter, had been provided with a smartphone while I was still in South Africa). They could record the interviews and send the recordings to me via WhatsApp. Once the co-researchers had their phones, I asked them for the best way to coordinate our work, and they suggested we create a WhatsApp group. As a first task, we agreed that they would ask verbal consent of the sub-ward committee's chairperson to have permission to start this new stage of our research. As the chairperson was aware and enthusiastic about this research, it did not take much time to agree on the methodological changes. I sent the information sheet and the consent form via WhatsApp to the three co-researchers. At the beginning of each interview, the co-researcher would translate and read the information sheet and the consent form to potential participants. Participants were then asked to confirm they were giving their informed consent to participate in the research. Their consent was given verbally and was audio recorded.

As a team of co-researchers, we decided to adopt a focalised approach to ensure the participation of those groups not yet involved in the previous phases. The co-researchers would be in charge of conducting three interviews each. After obtaining verbal consent, one of the co-researchers interviewed three elderly dwellers. Another co-researcher interviewed three women who were not part of the sub-ward committee. The third co-researcher interviewed the chairperson, the vice-chairperson, and one other member of the sub-ward committee. The three co-researchers told me they felt more comfortable having the interviews in Xhosa or Zulu. Hence, we agreed they would send me via WhatsApp both the audios (for me to keep the record) and the image of their written transcriptions into English. After two weeks, and considering those nine recent interviews, we completed a total of 34 interviews with different dwellers of the informal settlement.

Unfortunately, by the end of October 2020, a terrible event occurred in Magangeni. A couple of dwellers fell asleep while they were cooking. The result was a big fire in which the couple and their baby died, and 109 houses were destroyed. This regrettable event came when the people of the settlement were already struggling because of the spread of Covid-19 and its consequent lockdown. Consequently, during the first weeks of November, the municipality provided some tents and building materials for those who lost everything. This unfortunate event was to be included as a relevant case of Magangeni informal settlement organising, as further explained in the following sub-section.

*4.4.4.2 Integrating participatory data collection and participatory analysis*

After collecting the data during the various stages of the research, we had a WhatsApp meeting with the co-researchers to discuss the most relevant issues of the data being produced. On the occasion, the co-researchers identified three main issues -related to power dynamics and organising- they repeatedly encountered when conducting the interviews. These topics were (i) managing people and organising during the Covid-19 pandemic, (ii) managing people and organising after the fire incident, and (iii) organising around issues of gender-based violence within the informal settlement. As an open-ended and participatory process, this thesis aimed to consider the voice of the participants not only from their lived experiences but also in agreeing on the questions and aims for this research. In that sense, the co-researchers and I all decided that these three topics would help address the main research aims of this thesis. Firstly, they would help examine the various power dynamics involved in the different circumstances Magangeni faced during 2020 and 2021. Secondly, they would explore the various complexities of the subalterns organising in the informal settlement and the heterogeneous groups that form part of Magangeni, addressing their different challenges. Finally, by addressing the three topics the co-researchers identified, the data produced would eventually help understand the dynamics of informal organising and social sustainability as part of a broader debate on inclusion, participation, and social justice.

Consequently, for the next stage of the data production -and to promote a proactive and critical reflection of the co-researchers on those specific areas of organisation and organising they have identified-, I first asked each of them to choose one of the three topics and conduct a narrative- photovoice exercise. Through this exercise, the co-researchers would capture photographs and reflect on those pictures' images and stories. They would then be asked to reflect on the experience of capturing those pictures themselves. Finally, each of the three co-researchers would conduct a focus group (on their specific topic) with 6 participants. Both methods' main aim was to analyse what happened, how they organised, what they achieved, what was missing, and what could have been done better to pursue sustainable practices.

**Narrative- photovoice**

Photovoice is used to analyse the value, story or meaning of an image bringing participants to capture their life through the lens of a camera, allowing them to express their emotions and share meanings of their life situations (Suprapto et al., 2020). Photovoice can be used to enable participants to record and reflect their concerns, promote critical dialogue about these issues (in interaction with the photographs), and inform research policymakers, raising consciousness of issues to bring about social change (Simmonds et al. 2015). While this qualitative analysis has proved valuable across disciplines, it is predominantly used in participatory action research and other community-based related methodologies (ibid.). Photovoice gained popularity as a community-based participatory action research method since Wang and Burris (1994) developed it as a component of their work with women living in rural communities in China to promote a proactive and critical reflection on women's empowerment. Wang and Burris developed the concept of photovoice using theoretical literature on critical consciousness, feminist theory, and documentary photography to use visual representation for advocacy and social change (Liebenberg, 2018). These ideas were reinforced by Wang and Burris (1994) when asking the participants to take the photographs themselves, in recognition that they can better identify and represent their own realities (Harley, 2012). Other relevant goals of photovoice for my research relate to the subaltern's voice as this method includes engaging participants in active listening and dialogue, creating a safer environment for critical reflection, and moving people toward action (Carlson et al. 2006).

Moreover, Simmonds et al. (2015) forged a new methodology juxtaposing two concepts, photo-narratives and photovoice, to give rise to narrative-photovoice. While in photo-narrative, participants would choose the photographs they consider most relevant to display as visual images on any particular issue, it is stipulated that the photograph is the primary source of information and the explanation of the photograph, the secondary source of information (Mitchell and De Lange, 2011). Narrative-photovoice, in turn, would be explicitly underpinned by narrative inquiry theory. According to Simmonds et al. (2015), the objective of narrative-photovoice would be to listen to the marginalised voices and let the participants (the subalterns in this research) reveal what is displayed in their photographs in their own voice. The reflection would also consider the participants' experience in taking the photographs and being part of the research as both researcher and researched (Mitchell and De Lange, 2011). In summary, narrative-photovoice would blur the boundaries between photovoice and narrative inquiry to better capture the participants' lived experiences and their reflection in accompanying their experiences (Simmonds et al., 2015). In that sense, this method is considered appropriate for this research's participatory and critical approach as the data is being produced and analysed by the research participants themselves.

After the co-researchers chose between (i) managing people and organising during the Covid-19 pandemic; (ii) managing people and organising after the fire incident; and (iii) organising around issues of gender-based violence within the informal settlement, they were asked to take ten pictures each for their preferred topic. All these thirty photographs were then shared in our WhatsApp group. The instructions had to be unambiguous, so via the WhatsApp group we have formed, I asked the co-researchers to take photographs of landscapes, objects, or people anywhere in the informal settlement to represent the topic they had chosen. Photovoice-related research commonly uses the 'SHOWED model' to direct the interaction between participants and their photographs (Simmonds et al., 2015). This model is an acronym of a series of questions that are analytically oriented, in terms of what is seen in the picture; what is happening; how it relates to our lives; why a particular weakness exists; how to become empowered after understanding the problem; and what can we do about it (Larkin et al. 2007). However, in this exercise, I asked the co-researchers to freely analyse the photographs, considering the variables and concepts they thought were more relevant. The co-researchers and I then selected five photographs of each topic based on the quality of the image and on what we all agreed was more relevant for the stories they were planning to share. Each co-researcher was then asked to write notes describing the story of their five photographs and what they represented for them (two pages for each picture). They would then take a photograph of their notes and send me the image via our WhatsApp group. Once I received the data, we held a virtual meeting where we shared our experiences about the topic being investigated and reflected on their research participation. This data was complemented by the notes I included in my diary, where I reflected on my role and positionality, leading the co-researchers team.

This thesis also considers the existence of several ethical implications for photovoice. According to Wang and Redwood-Jones (2001), at least four kinds of invasion should be considered when using photovoice as a research method. Namely, the intrusion into one’s private space, the disclosure of embarrassing facts about individuals, being placed in a false light by images, and protection against using a person’s likeness for commercial benefit. The issue of intrusion into one’s private space was partially addressed in this thesis using consent forms. These forms had the same aim as those used for interviewing the participants, namely outlining their rights and responsibilities and giving permission to use those pictures for research objectives only. The participants would provide verbal consent for the co-researchers to take photographs of them and their shack if required. Regarding the disclosure of embarrassing facts about individuals, should it have been the case, I would not have used any image incriminating a participant or contradicting the values of photovoice. Fortunately, none of the pictures received went against what the team considered pertinent for the research. In terms of being placed in a false light by images or being embarrassed by the photograph, this was not the case either because most of the photographs we chose did not include participants, but mainly material issues. Finally, regarding protection against the use of a person’s likeness for commercial benefit, we agreed that the photographs were to be used for research analysis purposes only (not for exhibition). During this period, the photograph owner would be the co-researcher who captured it. The photographs would then be deleted from their phones and any other devices after submitting this thesis.

**Focus groups**

Our final step was planning and conducting three focus groups. One related to each of the selected topics, namely, Covid-19 management, the fire incident, and gender-based violence. As previously described in this section, the main aim of the focus groups was to cover in-depth what happened, how they organised, what they achieved, what was missing, and what could have been done better to pursue sustainable practices.

Focus groups generate data at three units of analysis: the individual, the group, and the interaction (Cyr, 2016). In that sense, focus group research provides "access to participants' own language, concepts and concerns; encouraging the production of more fully articulated accounts; and offering an opportunity to observe the process of collective sense-making in action" (Wilkinson, 1998, p.181). Besides, it has also been argued that several types of sensitive and personal disclosures are more likely in a focus group setting than in personal interviews (Guest et al., 2017). In focus groups, participants are selected because they are purposive, although not necessarily representative, sampling of a specific population. Thus, participants are chosen on the criteria that they have something to say on the topic and would be comfortable talking to the moderator and each other (Rabiee, 2004). While the number of participants for a focus group may vary, Krueger (2014) suggest between six and ten participants are large enough to gain different perspectives and small enough not to become disorderly. Based on the participants' knowledge and experiences, the three co-researchers of Magangeni recruited 6 participants for each focus group. Each of the three co-researchers oversaw leading one focus group, preparing the questions based on the main aims previously described in this section. They moderated them in their local language and ensured confidentiality to the participants. The focus groups were recorded and translated to English by each co-researcher. The transcripts were then captured in photographs and sent to me via WhatsApp.

Section 4.5 first reflected on my positionality as a researcher and then described the three different stages involved in data production for this research and the methods employed in each of them. The section also explained how the research methods were adapted in response to measures introduced to control the spread of the Covid-19 virus, including social distancing and travel restrictions. The first stage described the methods used in the field before the Covid-19 outbreak. This stage considered 18 face-to-face semi-structured interviews, more than 120 written pages in a personal diary (reflecting on participant observation), and a stakeholders’ mapping including the different actors involved in the informal settlement (collectively constructed with academics of UTFS, one of the co-researchers, a representative of the informal settlement committee, and a representative of Langutani municipality), carried out between January and March 2020. The second stage described the methods used to produce data under lockdown while still in South Africa. These included 10 phone-call semi-structured interviews in the field between March and May 2020. The third and last stage describes the methods conducted by the co-researchers after I returned to the UK. This stage included 9 face-to-face semi-structured interviews, an exercise of narrative-photovoice (a total of 30 photographs captured, of which 15 were described and analysed by the co-researchers), and 3 focus groups (of 6 participants each), between June 2020 and February 2021. In so doing, the two last stages also intended to contribute to innovative approaches to undertake participatory research from a distance.

The following subsection examines reflexive thematic analysis as the chosen approach to analyse the data produced in this research.

*4.4.5 Data analysis: Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis (CAQDA)*

For the semi-structured interviews, the co-researchers and I asked similar questions to different participants to compare, categorise, and systematically analyse their answers. Most of the interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. Only a few interviews conducted by co-researchers during the lockdown period were not audio recorded. The co-researcher translated the answers to English for those interviews and shared their handwritten notes with me. All interview transcripts, participant observation diary entries, and narrative-photovoice pictures and notes were imported into Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis (CAQDA), more specifically to NVivo. This program has at least four critical tasks that can ease the manual analysis of qualitative data. These are the ability to manage raw data and ideas by organising interview transcripts and notes of observations; query data; modelling visually through conceptual and relational diagrams; and reporting, by formulating transcript records about the study (Bazeley and Jackson, 2013).

I then used thematic analysis, as “a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns within data” (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.79). The themes and subthemes resulted from the revision of the field notes that made up the data (as an inductive approach). They, therefore, did not necessarily relate to the initial research question and main aims of the investigation per se. Consequently, there was not necessarily a relationship between the initial questions and the themes interpreted from the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). To identify those themes, I focussed on patterns (threads of topics that appear through the interviews), typologies and expressions used by the participants to reflect on what the interviewees answered (Ryan and Bernard, 2003).

We then followed the six phases of thematic analysis suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006). First, the co-researchers and I transcribed all the interviews and notes, which also helped to familiarise us with the data. I put all the notes together, took them a picture, and sent the images to the co-researchers via WhatsApp so that we all had access to the same information. Second, I generated initial codes, mainly through ‘open coding’ in NVivo. This process involved breaking down, examining, and categorising data into broad categories and then subdividing the broader categories into smaller sub-categories in a continuing revision and refinement of the process (Corbin and Strauss, 1990). The third stage involved ‘axial coding’ (Corbin and Strauss, 1990), to examine how the relationships between those sub-categories formed overarching themes. In this stage, I review the potential themes with the co-researchers. While some codes formed main themes, others formed sub-themes or were just discarded on this part of the process (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The sum of several sub-themes helped to address main research themes enlightening the differences and different interests within the research participants. In contrast, other sub-themes were discarded in the search for consistency within my data. Byrne (2021) suggests that many researchers intending to conduct thematic analysis fail to adhere fully to the principles of what Braun and Clarke (2019) defined as ‘reflexive thematic analysis’ (RTA). For Braun and Clarke (2019), in reflexive thematic analysis there should be no expectation that codes, themes, or sub-themes interpreted by one researcher may be reproduced by another. Conversely, RTA should encourage the researcher to embrace reflexivity, subjectivity, and creativity in the analysis process. In that sense, in RTA, the researcher should aim to adopt a constructionist epistemology in which the recurrence of similar answers is important for coding, but more important is the meaningfulness of the answers (Byrne, 2021).

The fourth phase of thematic analysis considered reviewing the themes to check if they were coherent to the entire data set to build a thematic map of the analysis. This mapping involved connecting ideas of forms, levels, and spaces of power to other variables such as the heterogeneous identities of the subalterns, their shifting alliances, and the contingencies experienced during 2020 (Covid-19 outbreak and the fire incident, among others). According to Byrne (2021), it is throughout a critical orientation that the researcher should be able to “inform the construction of systems of meaning, and therefore offer interpretations of meaning further to those explicitly communicated by participants” (p.6). As further addressed in the Analysis chapters, issues regarding gender-based violence and kinship relationships of power were sometimes omitted and some others accepted by some of the participants. Consequently, this thesis also reflected and analysed those issues as invisible forms of power using Gaventa’s power cube framework (2006). The mapping of the fourth phase of thematic analysis, in turn, led to the fifth phase of naming, defining, and refining themes, writing a detailed analysis of each one of them and their sub-themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The process concluded with the sixth phase, when writing the analysis, intending to provide a coherent, logical, and solid argument concerning the final research aims and the question of this thesis (ibid.). Once finished with my writing, I planned a trip to South Africa to present and share the findings of my work with the co-researchers and the rest of the participants.

**4.5 Conclusion**

Chapter IV discussed the philosophical assumptions and theoretical perspectives guiding my research. Informed by a relativist ontology and a social constructionist epistemology, this thesis takes an interpretivist approach and is based on qualitative research. Consequently, this work contemplates PAR as its main strategy to bring together theory and practice in participation with others. In so doing, this chapter reflected on the challenges of PAR in building relationships and sharing power between researcher and participants, and on the questioning that PAR has faced in terms of quality, validity, and ethics. This chapter also described how I had to adapt my main strategy and research methods in response to measures introduced to control the spread of Covid-19 virus, to keep a participatory and reflective approach. In that sense, this thesis aims to contribute to the debate on innovative approaches developed to undertake participatory research from a distance.

The following chapters examine the findings of this thesis and analyse them throughout four different chapters. Chapter V sets the context of power dynamics and the subalterns in Magangeni informal settlement. In so doing, it identifies the various stakeholders involved in the informal settlement and analyses them through Gaventa’s power cube framework (2006) and the power/interest grid (Mathur et al., 2007). Chapters VI, VII, and VIII, in turn, reflect on the power dynamics and the subalterns organising with regards to three different topics identified by the co-researchers, namely gender-based violence, Covid-19 outbreak, and a fire incident that took place in October 2020 in Magangeni.

**Chapter V: Power dynamics and the subalterns’ context in Magangeni**

Chapter V conceptualises power dynamics and subalternity, the two main dimensions addressed in this thesis, exploring the complexities, tensions, and contradictions of the power dynamics of the subalterns organising in Magangeni informal settlement. Consequently, it aims to contribute to new conceptual and empirical knowledge on the relationship between power dynamics, subaltern organisational processes and practices, and social change in informal settlements. In that sense, this chapter identifies the different stakeholders affecting Magangeni power dynamics, its multiple alliances, and how these can alter or perpetuate the dynamics of subjugation that the subalterns face. In so doing, it serves as an introduction for the following three findings/analysis chapters.

The first part of this chapter analyses power dynamics and subalternity in Magangeni by employing the power cube framework, examining its three key foci: levels, spaces, and forms of power (see section 3.2.6). To discuss the different levels of power and how they interrelate, the section then introduces how the municipality and the neighbourhood have connected and worked together as part of a collective project to co-produce knowledge to protect and restore the land and river environment. To illustrate the complexities of spaces of power dynamics, I analyse how the formation of housing strategies has moved from a reliance on closed spaces toward one based on invited and claimed spaces of participation. The third sub-section focuses on the last dimension of Gaventa’s power cube framework, namely forms of power in Magangeni. Consequently, it shows how the different power dimensions are interrelated and dynamic, therefore constantly changing and depending on the context in which they are analysed.

The second part of this chapter analyses the empirical work above described. Its first sub-section discusses power dynamics using the power cube framework and the power/interest grid. By combining different power analysis tools, this part aims to develop more nuanced answers to how and who experiences powers at different levels, what kind of power is being exercised, and how actors are enabled or constrained by that power. The second sub-section conceptualises subalternity and explores the nuances and complexities of the subalterns organising in an informal settlement as part of a broader debate on inclusion, social justice, and participation of the marginalised and oppressed. In so doing, it reflects on the heterogeneity of the subalterns and how mainstream MOS has neglected their voice. The third and last part provides the conclusions of this chapter.

**5.1 Power dynamics: Context and Findings**

I used the' power cube' framework to analyse and reflect on power dynamics in Magangeni. This framework examines three different but interrelated dimensions of power: levels, spaces, and forms of power (see Figure 5A). What is most powerful about the cube is that the three categories are dynamic and related; hence they will constantly re-define and affect each other. For Gaventa (2006, p.30), “strategies for alignment along one axis (*of the power cube*) may contribute to misalignment on another. Those who study the Rubik’s cube argue that there are literally billions of different positions that the blocks of the cube may have, illustrating the complexity and permutations in which power can take across space, place and form in any given context” (p.30). In other words, if Magangeni seeks to challenge existing power asymmetries in all its levels, spaces, and forms, it needs to search not for one solution but to build multiple strategies that can be linked to aligning all three dimensions of power. According to the scholar, that is when transformative change might happen.

The power cube framework has proved to be highly versatile, being used to analyse power in relation to participation, policy and governance, economic justice, human rights, mental health, and peacebuilding, among other issues. Considering these different experiences, Gaventa (2019) reinforces the need to contextualise the various dimensions of power, as their meaning can vary according to each setting. The scholar also highlights the importance of thinking dynamically, as spaces for action can open and close over time. Finally, he invites us to “move away from simplistic and binary understandings of power to a focus on the multiple ways and places in which it manifests itself” (p.14).

In her work, Pantazidou (2012) reviewed a significant number of experiences, case studies, and other documents that put the power cube framework into practice. As a tool for power analysis, the scholar suggests the power cube framework has mainly been used as a method for context analysis, as a method for strategy and action, or as a method for facilitation and learning. While this chapter focuses mainly on the power cube as a method for context analysis, Chapters VI, VII and VIII apply the framework for strategy, action, and learning on three specific topics related to power dynamics and local organising in Magangeni.

*Figure 5A: The power cube framework (adapted)*



(Source: Gaventa, 2006)

My research takes place in Magangeni, an informal settlement situated in Langutani municipality and part of Ward 14[[7]](#footnote-7). Magangeni has a household size of approximately 1083 and is located close to residential suburbs, major transport routes and the Central Business District (Sutherland et al., 2018; Sutherland et al., 2019). The informal settlement organises through an area sub-committee that informs the ward committee of its main issues. The area sub-committee includes representatives of the four different sections of the informal settlement, namely Rhangani 1, Rhangani 2, Michipisi, and Mahuntsi. After the local government elections of 2016, Magangeni shifted from being an ANC-led settlement in an ANC ward to a Democratic Alliance (DA) - led settlement in a DA ward for the period 2016-2021. However, the ANC, and its former councillor, would still have a strong presence engaging with the community (Sutherland et al. 2019).

The following subsections examine the different dimensions of Gaventa’s power cube framework in Magangeni informal settlement. Consequently, Table 5C summarises the main levels, spaces, and forms of power affecting Magangeni. The table is divided into four different columns. The first column refers to Gaventa’s different power dynamics, namely levels, spaces, and forms of power. The second column identifies what stakeholders are involved in each power dynamic. The third column explains how and to what extent are those stakeholders engaged in each power dynamic. Finally, the last column describes how and to what extent those power dynamics can affect informality. In so doing, it aims to examine one of the specific aims of this research, namely, to address informal organising as part of a broader debate on inclusion, social justice, and participation. The second part of this chapter presents my empirical work in detail. The findings are divided into different sections for levels, spaces, and forms of power (as summarised in the table).

*Table* *5C: Summary of findings: power dynamics in Magangeni informal settlement*

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Power dynamics** | **Who is involved?** | **In what ways?** | **Approach to informality** |
| ***Levels of power*** |
| *National* | Government | National Constitution (“everyone has the right to adequate housing”)/ Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) (informal settlements eradication)  | Informality as an obstacle to development. Justification of informal housing eradication. |
| Breaking New Ground (BNG) Policy (informal settlements upgrading) | A holistic approach to housing. Depending on the land's availability and sustainability, the community is now relocated or upgraded with essential services such as communal tap points, pit latrines, or ablution blocks containing toilets and water points. |
| *Municipal* | Municipality | Department of Land Invasion  | Informal housing as a technical issue, requiring technical solutions: Eviction of new builds |
| Department of Human Settlements (Resilience Strategy) | Collaborative settlement action |
| *Neighbourhood* | Ward 14 | Wards do not count with executive power/ Poor communication with Magangeni | Informal settlements not represented |
| ***Spaces of power*** |
| *Closed* | Government | Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) (informal settlements eradication) | Informal settlements not invited to the discussion |
| Ward 14 | Magangeni has no representation in Ward 14 committee |
| *Invited* | Department of Human Settlements/ UTFS (River Rehabilitation Project, RRP) | Magangeni was invited to engage with the different stakeholders of the catchment | Informal settlements are recognised as terrain of habitation, livelihood, and politics. Recognition of their spaces of poverty and forms of agency |
| *Claimed* | Magangeni area committee/ Magangeni dwellers | Magangeni dwellers claiming for better living conditions: Protests/ ‘Illegal’ connections to basic services/ Memorandums of Understanding |
| ***Forms of power*** |
| *Visible* | Government | Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) (informal settlements eradication) | Housing policy serves to maintain order and control space in urban areas, defining standards of normality and appropriateness through regulation |
| Municipality | Department of Land Invasion  | Informal housing as a technical issue, requiring technical solutions: Eviction of new builds |
| Ward 14 Committee  | Formal rules, structures, and procedures of decision-making. | N/A |
| Magangeni Area committee | Formal structure within a context of informality |
| *Hidden* | UTFS/ UTFS lead researcher | Critical role as an intermediary between the informal settlement and Langutani municipality | UTFS as the ‘bridge’ between informality (Magangeni) and formality (municipality) |
| *Invisible* | Community of Innovation (CoI), RRP | Discrimination of Magangeni dwellers coming from neighbours of high-income residential areas | Denigration of dwellers living in informal housing |
| Magangeni Area Committee | Gender inequality | N/A |

*5.1.1 Levels of power*

The first dimension of Gaventa’s ‘power cube’ framework is related to the levels where social, political, and economic power resides. According to Gaventa (2006), this dimension contains the contest between global, national, and local arenas as locations of power. The importance of levels of engagement would vary according to the context, purpose, and challenges of different organisations and individuals. Breaking down the levels of power in categories of contextual relevance might also help grasp the relationality of power, as an individual might be powerful in one setting and powerless in another. For example, the most powerful at the local level could be the least powerful at the national level (Pantazidou, 2012). For Gaventa (2006), the key is to understand these dynamics as an adaptable continuum, not fixed dimensions.

While this research focuses on the municipality and the neighbourhood levels, the following section aims to provide contextual information on how and to what extent the national level of power has also affected Magangeni informal settlement. As previously described, all three levels are interrelated and cannot be understood without the other. In that sense, this chapter identifies the national, municipal, and neighbourhood levels of power as the three main levels of Magangeni engagement in the public sphere. The sections below introduce the three levels to examine to what extent these can alter or perpetuate the power asymmetries the subalterns face in the informal settlement.

*5.1.1.1 The national level of power*

While the main interest of this research relates to the neighbourhood level of power, the following two sub-sections aim to explore the country level and a municipal level to help contextualise the empirical material and understand that all three levels of power are, to some extent, interrelated. In that sense, it has been argued that the political transition in South Africa held up as an example of a successfully negotiated settlement through which “a ‘rainbow nation’ now basks in a variety of political, social, and economic freedoms denied them under apartheid” (Harley, 2012, p.328). However, what the political settlement transition arguably did was strengthen the power of capital (Bond, 2000). Within two years of the return to democracy in 1994, the new ANC-led Government adopted a macroeconomic policy of Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR), continuing an economic reform process started decades before by the apartheid government. This macroeconomic strategy included trade liberalisation and the privatisation of basic services, such as water and electricity, having catastrophic results for ‘the poor’ (Harley, 2012).

During the second half of the 1990s, many citizens were disconnected from water and electricity infrastructure. As the authorities widely imposed a prepaid system on marginalised communities, those unable to pay were ‘disconnected’ (Bond, 2000). This form of marginality grounded in exclusion from the political economy of capitalism configures an example of the development of subalternity in recent history. Especially among the marginalised in the urban context, many would find it challenging to live and work within the market discipline, contracts, and bureaucratic rationale, seeking alternative or ‘informal’ institutions and relations in production, trade, and even housing (see section 2.1.2).

In response to some of the challenges faced by the most marginalised in the country, in 1994, the African National Congress (ANC) adopted a policy of large-scale delivery of subsidised formal housing. By introducing the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) and the White Paper of Housing, the aim was to deliver one million houses within their first five years of office (Mitlin and Mogaladi, 2013). Moreover, the national Constitution of 1996 would state in Section 26 (1) that everyone would have the right to adequate housing (South African Government, 1996). Arguably, this would help to provide safety and security to its occupants and at the same time, confirm their position as citizens with associated rights and entitlements (Mitlin and Mogaladi, 2013). Aligned with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), ‘informal settlements’ were expected to be eradicated (Braathen et al., 2014).

However, in 2000 the Constitutional Court claimed that the post-apartheid South African housing policy was not meeting the right to adequate housing suggested in the Constitution of 1996. As described by Sutherland (2019, p.9), “even though the state has delivered more than 3 million houses since 1994, it has been unable to meet the housing demand in cities produced by rapid urbanisation, natural population increase and the decompression of crowded households in townships and informal settlements”. The Government assumed it would not meet the housing delivery targets and shifted its policy, focusing on providing services rather than merely on eradication. In other words, they moved from suggesting informal housing was unacceptable to acknowledging a more significant role for informality (Braathen et al., 2014). The language around the formal/ informal dichotomy initially presented in Government housing policy and discourse had to change in response to the context circumstances.

Then in 2004, the Breaking New Ground (BNG) Policy was introduced. Taking a more holistic approach to housing that recognised both formal and informal forms, this policy included the Upgrading of Informal Settlements Programme (UISP), which focused on acquiring and rehabilitating urban lands, increased flexibility in planning, and social services provision and economic amenities (Dupont et al., 2016). However, government plans for upgrading did not always produce the intended result. Sanele is an officer of Langutani Municipality. During an interview undertaken for this study, he recalls that the Department of Human Settlement offered Magangeni dwellers moving to another area with newly built houses. “*The Government did build the houses... further West in the city. It was 2006… before Magangeni became this big… Some people refused to move. Other people did relocate. In fact, some of the committee members got really nice houses in that area… but they decided to go back to Magangeni. We don’t know whether they sold their houses or what, but they went back.*” *(Personal interview, March 2020).* Badyia works for the UISP in Langutani Municipality. He thinks the relocation of Magangeni did not work because of the location of the new houses. “*It was in Park Gate… which is a bit far from where the settlement is now. So, there was a problem with social networks… with livelihoods… with transport. Those are all things that make upgrading informal settlement to be very tricky. Then maybe you need to ask how do we better manage relocations? But we also face the reality that most of the available land in Langutani district is not close to where informal settlements are.*” *(Personal interview, March 2020)*

Later, in 2010, President Jacob Zuma announced upgrading 400,000 ‘informal settlement’ units as the new housing target. The quality of housing was a key focus of this new policy (Meth, 2020). Depending on land availability, communities were to be relocated or upgraded with basic services such as communal tap points, pit latrines or ablution blocks containing toilets and water points. When not all the original settlement dwellers can be accommodated in the new housing project, problems arise, which is in most cases (Braathen et al., 2014). Particularly in Magangeni: “(The settlement) … is not likely to be moved in its entirety in the near future, due to the large housing backlogs and slower delivery of formal low-cost housing in the city, as well as the resistance of the community to move to state-subsidised housing on the periphery of the city” (Sutherland et al., 2019, p. 12).

The following section examines the findings of the second level of power in Gaventa’s power cube framework, namely the municipal level.

*5.1.1.2 The municipal level of power*

Over the last two decades, Langutani municipality has had both repressive and transformative strategies for addressing informal settlements in the city. On the one hand, the Department of Land Invasion attempts to evict ‘new builds’ to control the expansion of informal houses across the city within the legal framework. On the other hand, the Department of Human Settlements supports a more progressive approach, allowing informal settlements to be included as one of the two pillars of the city’s Resilience Strategy 2017, ensuring collaborative settlement action (Sutherland et al., 2018). In decision-making, a clear example of including informal settlements, particularly Magangeni, has been the invitation to participate in the River Rehabilitation Project (RRP) (see section 5.1.2.4)[[8]](#footnote-8). Magangeni has engaged with different stakeholders, including the municipality, UTFS, NGOs, and conservancy groups (nature conservation organisations), as part of this initiative.

Sanele, a municipality officer, recognises that engaging with the community has been crucial for the municipality “*to get people's real experience in ‘informal settlements’… at the hardcore level. As an outsider, you think you are solving the problem just to find out that you are not even touching the problem. You only get to understand those issues once you engage with the people experiencing these things on a day-to-day basis. Because most of us… we don’t live in informal settlements. We are staying in suburban areas. But at the same time, in our jobs… we are forced to plan for informal settlements. So, how can you plan for informal settlements without getting their perspectives? Going there… you will be surprised when you ask them, ‘what are your priorities, or the things you want to be done within their settlements?’” (Personal interview, March 2020).* He then adds, *“It is not only developing a solution on your own but co-developing a solution together with the dwellers. They will tell you ‘If you want to solve this, why can’t you try A, B or C?’ We tend that whenever there is a problem, we think that we will sit in our offices, and we will develop a solution… all to find out that the solution is out there. The problem is that we are not engaging with the people with the solution. So that is why I always try to bring people within informal settlements because I believe the solution lies with them. No matter how good we are, we can’t develop solutions or interventions to assist them, without them”. (Personal interview, March 2020).*

In the same vein, Badyia, who works for the UISP in Langutani Municipality, agrees on the relevance of partnership and co-production for the Upgrading of Informal Settlements Programme in the area. “*We run a partnership programme between the municipality, the European Union (EU), and an NGO. The overall method or vision of the programme is to produce developmental plans for local communities. And the key methodology is the co-production of those developmental plans. So, it’s not a municipality tool… dictating what should happen… but rather, we want to create a platform where there is a co-production of these developmental plans. This means working on the ground with the communities… because communities themselves understand their spaces better than anyone else and work with the support of local NGOs and civil society. So basically, it is a programme that is open to persons working within the informal settlement spaces and have the local expertise*” *(Personal interview, March 2020).*

In both cases,the municipality officers highlight the relevance of co-producing knowledge with the subalterns identifying different solutions to the various challenges Magangeni informal settlement faces. This collaborative experience, in turn, creates several other challenges in terms of power, needs, coordination and consensus among its members, as further examined in the Analysis section. The following sub-section describes the findings of the third level of power adapted from Gaventa’s power cube framework, namely neighbourhood levels of power. It particularly examines the role of wards as a relevant strategy introduced by the South African post-apartheid Government to promote participatory governance.

*5.1.1.3 The neighbourhood level of power*

As previously stated, the South African Demarcation Board divides municipalities into smaller geopolitical subdivisions known as wards. Magangeni informal settlement is part of Ward 14. Each ward has a ward committee consisting of ten individuals, plus the councillor, who is directly elected by each ward and is also the committee's chairperson. In theory, the ward’s functioning should go beyond party politics. In practice, however, ward committees' functioning is highly dependent on the political will of the local government party (Piper and Deacon, 2009). For instance, after the local government elections of 2016, Ward 14 shifted from being an ANC-led ward to a Democratic Alliance (DA) councillor for 2016-2021. And while Magangeni has never had a representative in Ward 14 committee, the informal settlement organises through an ‘area sub-committee’ that informs Ward 14 committee of the informal settlement's main issues. In that sense, while the former ANC councillor would still have a strong presence engaging with Magangeni (Sutherland et al. 2019), the effective communication channels between the current DA councillor and Magangeni tend to be relatively poor. According to Lulama, a representative of the Magangeni sub-committee, “*The relationship used to be very good during the time of the councillor from the ruling party* [the ANC]*, but after him, things changed*” *(Personal interview, February 2020)*. James is a member of the Magangeni committee too. He states that “*the relationship* *is very weak. The councillor is not responding to our problems… Whenever we call for a meeting, he does not show up… Even if we go to his office, we will not find him there.”* *(Personal interview, October 2020)* Mkateko, another sub-committee member, agrees with James: “*We call him because he is the ward councillor. But the relationship is very poor. We try to organise via phone calls because he hardly visits us… Even when we phone him, he is not available… We meet him maybe once a year*” *(Personal interview, October 2020).*

So far, this chapter has used the power cube framework to introduce the context and examine the findings of the different levels of power affecting Magangeni informal settlement. At the national level, it addressed the housing laws and policies implemented by the Government in post-Apartheid South Africa. In this manner, it described how the Government had to shift its approach from denigrating informality to considering the upgrading of informal settlements as a valid pathway to address the housing backlog in the country. At a municipal level, this section examined the collaborative relationship that Langutani municipality has built with informal settlements in the area, despite the apparent dichotomy between evictions and upgrading strategies for informal housing. At a neighbourhood level, the role of wards was explored as a relevant strategy introduced by the South African post-apartheid Government to promote participatory governance. By introducing Ward 14, this section examined the poor communication between the ward councillor and Magangeni informal settlement and how the settlers of Magangeni feel their voice is not being heard.

Yet, as previously described, the power cube framework does not intend to be a checklist to check off each dimension or provide static analysis of a particular setting. On the contrary, it intends to provide a dynamic analysis, as levels of power and how they relate to each other are highly dependent on the context. Consequently, the following section details how Langutani municipality and the neighbourhood have connected and worked together as a collective project. Through a particular initiative, the community –including Magangeni informal settlement- has been invited to improve their living conditions and have an active involvement in the protection and restoration of the land and river environment.

*5.1.1.4 The municipal-neighbourhood power dynamics: The River Rehabilitation Project*

The city where this research takes place “faces a range of environmental issues associated with rivers, including more frequent and intense flooding events, solid waste pollution (including disposable diapers and a wide range of plastic products), elevated levels of nutrients associated with failures in sanitation systems, inadequate wastewater disposal, erosion, poor water quality, the overexploitation of the natural resource base and the proliferation of alien invasive species” (Turpie et al, 2017, p. 3). Magangeni informal settlement is located by a river. It has been in existence for more than 30 years, with people building and re-building their houses even after experiencing flooding events (Sutherland et al., 2019). As Sanele explains, “*the settlement is on a flood plain, so it’s prone to flooding. Therefore, we need to come up with a solution that minimises the impact of flooding… which for that settlement is quite difficult. Because if you put a* settlement on top of a flood plain, you are likely to experience flooding every time it rains for consecutive days” (Personal interview, March 2020). Nyeletti, who lives in Magangeni, describes that *“whenever there are heavy rains, people’s shacks of the edge of the river get washed away” (Personal interview, March 2020).* Martin, another Magangeni dweller, explains that *“once the river is full, it washes away people’s houses on the edge of the river… so then the people have to re-build their houses in-between the spaces of the existing houses… it is very difficult” (Personal interview, March 2020).* Besides, after the settlers built their new houses ‘in-between’ the spaces of the existing houses, there are now no more spaces for the children of the settlement to play. As Julia, a member of the Magangeni sub-ward committee, adds, *“our children now go and play by the river… and that is very dangerous for them”. (Personal interview, March 2020)* This lack of spaces and the high densification levels in the settlement have also brought recurrent fires, as further examined in the following chapters.

Yet, Langutani municipality has arguably had a transformative approach to natural hazard governance in the area over the last few years. According to Sutherland (2019), by identifying the vulnerability and marginalisation of communities in particular contexts, natural hazard governance has shifted from a state-centred plan, with limited citizens' involvement, to a more inclusive approach. This new strategy draws on the knowledge and skills of multiple actors, including community members, developing innovative approaches to plan and respond to natural hazards. In 2014, Langutani municipality and UTFS established the River Rehabilitation Project (RRP). The RRP was described as an innovative shared-governance approach to catchment-scale ecological infrastructure management with a climate change adaptation focus. The project primarily focuses on conservation, rehabilitation and restoration of natural systems within the river to improve community resilience towards climate change” (Langutani Municipality, 2020, p.1). Among the potential benefits of the project, Langutani municipality identified the restoration of ecological infrastructure for ecosystem provisioning, the improvement of the resilience of communities to climate change impacts, especially in informal settlements; and that local communities were now expected to be part of the projects planning and decision-making. To date, the project has been funded by international and national research programmes led by UTFS and the city’s Research Action Partnership (RAP), which includes municipal funding (Sutherland et al., 2019). As Sanele points out, *“we are trying to bridge the gap between science action and policies in the local Government… So, we provide funding for students to do research for us within the municipality. We fund students from Master levels to PhDs, as well as postdocs.” (Personal interview, March 2020).* Through the RAP partnership, and driven by UTFS, “community members of Magangeni informal settlement are engaging with research to understand better vulnerability associated with climate change and adaptation responses thereto. A product of this work will be a Climate Smart Booklet for informal settlements.” (Langutani municipality, 2020, p.2)

Over the last few years, the RRP has evolved, supporting a wide range of state-led, private sector and community-based initiatives as an experimental space of governing for sustainable development in the city (Sutherland, 2019). To implement the project action plan, in 2016, the Langutani Municipality’s Climate Protection Branch (CPB) developed a Community of Innovation (CoI). The idea was to include a wide range of actors in the initiative. The stakeholders currently involved in the CoI are Langutani municipality, UTFS, local NGOs, private sector conservancy groups, and Magangeni informal settlement, among other residents of the area. The progress in the implementation was planned to be discussed every four months by all the stakeholders involved in the project (Langutani Municipality, 2020). However, the participation of new stakeholders also created new challenges for the initiative. As Sanele comments, *“When you work with different stakeholders, you need to understand you’ve got people who are coming with different set of agendas or objectives. For example, the priority for someone who stays in an informal settlement is different from a community member who stays in the suburban area. You also have conservancy groups, who are doing a fantastic job in monitoring river pollution by the industries … but sometimes they will go overboard… in the sense that they will like all our interventions to focus on pollution by the industries, which is not the only objective we should be focusing on. They are other objectives… So those are the challenges. How do you balance… different interests coming from different stakeholders… to make sure that everyone stays and participate in the project”? (Personal interview, March 2020).* The following sub-section introduces the levels of power in which the various stakeholders involved in the CoI engage. After presenting the forms and spaces of power affecting Magangeni, section 5.2 will discuss all three dimensions of power dynamics among the different stakeholders involved in the informal settlement.

* + - 1. *CoI stakeholders*

**The Upgrading of Informal Settlements Programme (Langutani municipality)**

In 2018, Langutani municipality secured a capacitation grant from the European Union to pilot a partnership-based model of incremental informal settlement upgrading over three years. The initiative aimed to mobilise communities to upgrade and improve living conditions in informal settlements (Langutani Municipality, 2019). For this programme, the municipality project manager remembers that *“we invited a number of different stakeholders to contribute and suggest ten different settlements that we could work on. I think it was UTFS that got to nominate Magangeni… One key thing we were looking at was the issue of density because it is where most challenges are experienced. We initially had a threshold which was working with settlements with no less than 500 households, if I’m not mistaken… We also wanted settlements that were within the ‘urban development line’. This is because of subsidies and grants. For example, the Urban Sustainability Development Grant (USDG) is a government fund that is only meant to work within urban areas…and we needed those funds to complement the grant received from the European Union” (Personal interview, March 2020).* As a project manager, he comments he also needs to coordinate the involvement of different departments of Langutani municipality because *“while the project resides in the Department of Human Settlement, there are other municipality actors who implement something and are not part of Human Settlement. So, for example, you have Water and Sanitation, which is a whole different department, and they do the water and sanitation part. You’ve got Electricity that is a whole different department… and so forth. So, the programme is not only stakeholders and partnerships outside of the municipality, but is also attempting to say ‘municipality, how do we organise ourselves’, so that we have one conversation about informal settlements” (Personal interview, March 2020)*

Before the national lockdown of 2020, the programme was defining how much funds would be distributed to each different settlement. As the project manager describes, *“we’ve done a phase of hypothetical planning… to say, ‘this settlement needs a road… this settlement needs this or that’. The next phase was supposed to be going on now… unfortunately, it hasn’t been possible due to the lockdown. This should be the detailed planning phase. That is when we are going to start to reactivate those community-based teams… have a team that for example, is working on the road metric of the community… like the footpaths, accesses, and stuff… and then work with the different design consultants and NGOs that are also going to be hired to assist in the production of these developmental plans” (Personal interview, March 2020)*. To select the community-based team, the programme first contacts the sub-ward committee. Once they inform the committee of the programme's main objectives, they plan workshops to identify each informal settlement's critical issues and challenges. *“So, you say ‘leadership, based on those maybe five things you have identified, I would then need you to create five teams. It’s very preferential to have people not only from the area committee because we centralise knowledge and skills if we do that. So, we need the leaders to identify persons they think in the community would be better suited to assist… on those identified issues. ‘It’s up to you’. We are not dictating what decisions they must take, but we’re going to need a team because that team is the one that will be working with the design consultants for us to come up with the possible solution you can propose. It is that team that will be the one responsible for speaking on behalf of the community” (Municipality project manager, March 2020).*

The partnership-based model of incremental informal settlement upgrading that Langutani municipality secured aimed to mobilise communities to upgrade and improve their living standards. This upgrade could include essential services such as communal tap points, pit latrines, ablution blocks containing toilets and water points, among others that each informal settlement could identify. In that sense, the process aimed to be participatory and include the informal settlement leadership for the decision-making and implementation of the plan.

**Conservancy groups (NGOs/Private sector)**

Another CoI stakeholder is a local NGO that partners with Langutani municipality and the private sector. Its main aim is to see communities thrive in balance with their habitats, driving awareness and active involvement in protecting and restoring land and river environments. Sustainable strategies include litter removal and litter booms' installation as an interim approach to in-stream and waste collection, river management, land care, and restoration interventions.

Julia, a Magangeni dweller, recalls, *“When the NGO first came here, they didn’t meet the area committee. They met the councillor... and we were not happy with them. So, we told them that if they wanted to be here, they would have to work with the area committee. So, then they talked to one of our members, and only then they were formally introduced to the committee. Now we work together, and four people in Magangeni are paid to help remove the litter” (Personal interview, March 2020). “We formed a group of women who did recycling in the past five years. Unfortunately, we had ups and downs and most of us were not well trained. We also had difficulties with the pick-ups, so the group finally dismantled... Then, when this NGO came to our settlement, we were recognised for our hard work of managing waste. Unfortunately, only four of us were chosen to continue with the project”*, adds Patricia, a Magangeni dweller who volunteers for this initiative. *(Personal interview, February 2020)*

This initiative has also been complemented by Langutani municipality, which has managed to get the Department of Solid Waste on board, as Sanele explains: *“Hence now, within Magangeni, waste is starting to be collected, something that didn’t happen in the past. They would just dump their waste directly to the river. But now our Waste Department is even starting to distribute plastic bags for people to put their waste… and then everyday they will come and collect their waste. Those are small gains of participating of the River Rehabilitation Project” (Personal interview, March 2020).* In 2016, private sector conservancy groups presented a project to rehabilitate the rivers in each of the 17 catchments in the Langutani municipality. The initiative intended to restore the condition of the rivers of the region through various strategies, including cleaning of invasive alien species and mobilising the communities to take responsibility for the health of the stretch of river that they live on. For this purpose, they invited each community to present their candidates to volunteer for this work. In 2020, community members of Magangeni were invited to apply, complete a form, and start a training process that would end with selecting four volunteers to represent the Magangeni settlement. Unfortunately, due to the Covid-19 outbreak, the process had to be interrupted.

**Magangeni research team**

There are six representatives of the Magangeni informal settlement who regularly attend the CoI meetings. They all volunteered for a research group formed by the UTFS in 2014. Julia remembers it was in that year when she first heard about the interest of UTFS in Magangeni. *“There was a woman who came to ask the chairperson of our committee if there was anyone interested in volunteering for a research project she wanted to conduct” (Personal interview, March 2020).* After calling a meeting, Julia and another five settlers expressed their interest. Since then, they have not stopped working with UTFS. Martin is also part of this group and explains that *“when UTFS has something to introduce… like research she wants to do in the community… she would normally come to us… when there is a project to be implemented here in the settlement, we are the first ones to know that there will be a project taking place”. (Personal interview, March 2020)*

Arguably, the most important collaborative project of UTFS and the team of researchers of Magangeni is one of ‘datafication’ that has been in place since 2014. The project forms part of the River Rehabilitation Project (RRP). Its main aim was to increase the ‘visibility’ of the informal settlement through a participatory data collection and production. The project also supported social learning, climate adaptation, and building resilience in Magangeni (Sutherland et al., 2019). “When the RRP was established in 2014, the UTFS researchers argued, in their initial meetings with the Langutani Water and Sanitation Unit (EWS) from Langutani Municipality, that it was critical to co-produce knowledge on the catchment with community-based organisations using participatory approaches if resilient and sustainable water and climate governance was to be built” (ibid., p.12). Since 2014, the data co-produced between researchers and informal settlers in Magangeni informal settlement include baseline data with the history and geography of the settlement, community-based and participatory Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping, the development of a ‘climate-smart informal settlement handbook’, and participation in the development of the city’s Resilience Strategy with the municipality of Langutani (Sutherland et al., 2019).

This subsection has presented the levels of power in which the various stakeholders involved in the CoI interact. It has introduced the municipality’s relationships with international donors, conservancy groups (NGOs and private sector), and Magangeni informal settlement. Later in this chapter, section 5.2 will discuss where the power of the different stakeholders come from, what kind of power is being exercised, and how actors are enabled or constrained by that power. The following sub-section focuses on the second dimension of Gaventa’s power cube framework, namely spaces of power, in Magangeni informal settlement. As stated at the beginning of this chapter, the power cube framework does not intend to be a checklist to check off each dimension or valorise one dimension over another. Instead, the main aim is to illustrate the complexity in which power can take across levels, spaces, and forms in an informal settlement and how these three dimensions are dynamic and interrelated. Hence, they will constantly re-define and affect each other.

*5.1.2 Spaces of power*

According to Cornwall (2002), spaces for participation are not neutral. They are shaped by power relations, which both surround and enter them. For Gaventa (2006, p.26), “power relations help to shape the boundaries of participatory spaces, what is possible within them, and who may enter, with which identities, discourses and interests”. This section examines how the spaces for participation were created in Magangeni and with whose interests and what terms of engagement.

In his ‘power cube framework’, Gaventa (2006) suggests the spaces for participation can be closed, invited, or claimed/created. Closed spaces of power describe decisions made by a set of actors ‘behind doors’ with no intention of including others. They are also known as ‘provided’ spaces because elites make decisions and eventually provide services to the people without consulting or involving them. A clear example of closed spaces of participation in South Africa occurred when the ANC implemented the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) and the White Paper of Housing in 1994. As earlier examined in this chapter, the initiative was aligned with the United Nations Millennium Development Goals and intended to eradicate all informal settlements. Those living in informal settlements were never consulted and would eventually be evicted from where they lived. It was only after assuming that they were not going to provide and secure ‘formal housing’ to the whole of the South African population that the Government decided to shift its housing policy towards upgrading informal settlements. Consequently, in this subsection, I analyse how the formation of housing strategies has moved from a reliance on closed space toward one based on invited spaces of participation.

Another example of closed spaces of power is illustrated in Ward 14. Magangeni is part of this ward, but the informal settlement has no representation on the ward committee and has severe difficulties communicating with the ward councillor. Arguably, the communication is very poor because the ward councillor represents the Democratic Alliance (DA), and Magangeni leaders have been historically related to the ANC. In that sense, the participants argued that the councillor would have less interest in Magangeni because he knew he would not count on their votes for future elections. After not feeling represented, considered, or heard, Magangeni informal settlement has had to find ways other than the ‘formal’ channels of participation to state their needs and claim their rights. These alternative avenues have included engaging with other stakeholders acting as intermediaries with municipality officers or bypassing the councillor to communicate directly with the local government, as earlier described in this chapter.

Invited spaces of power occur when individuals or organisations are invited to participate by other institutions or organisations (Gaventa, 2006). These spaces may be regularised, or more temporary, through one-off forms of consultation. As examined in section 2.3, including the participation and perception of the community is advocated in development studies to evaluate the effectiveness of organisations, increase their legitimacy, and address sustainable processes, locality development, and empowerment (Pilisuk et al. 1996; Brett, 2003; Brown, 2005; Kilby, 2006). According to Gaventa (2006), together with an apparent rise of participatory governance approaches, invited spaces would be seen at every level, from local government to national and even global policy forums. The surge of approaches to participatory governance and how this has affected invited spaces of participation is analysed by Badyia, who works for the UISP in Langutani Municipality. When interviewed about the power dynamics and accountability they had with the European Union, as one of the main donors of the programme, he explained: “*If you look globally, within the United Nations… the UN-Habitat, and so forth… working together with the community is no longer something foreign. It is something to be promoted very much… So, within the EU, I think there is 100% support for the methodology we are using. I think from that perspective, it has never been an issue the methodology… because it’s what currently everyone is saying… ‘Ok, we need to recognise that… when governments cannot do much… Communities themselves are like agents of their own’…, so we need to create spaces in which we are capacitating each other… so while we are learning from communities, they are learning from us… and then, in those spaces… we create… we attempt to create solutions*” *(Personal interview, March 2020).* At a municipal level, the River Rehabilitation Project (previously examined) would represent an invited space of power in which Magangeni representatives were arguably incorporated in the project's planning, decision-making, and implementation.

Finally, there are spaces claimed by the marginalised against the power holders or created more autonomously by them. In other words, the subalterns reject spaces created without them and create spaces for themselves. These claimed or created spaces can emerge from popular mobilisation, identity-based concerns (based on people’s culture, shared history, and beliefs) or simply spaces in which a community join in common pursuit (Cornwall, 2002). Self-claimed spaces would extend the idea of participation to one of citizenship, understanding it more as a political right rather than just as an invitation offered to beneficiaries of development’ (Gaventa, 2004) (see section 2.3). In Magangeni, these claimed spaces have acted through conflict strategies and tactics to pressure those in power. The actions taken by settlers can be interpreted as everyday acts of resistance to local authorities, such as illegally connecting to electricity and water services and protesting in the streets. “*We strike because once we strike, the authorities start to listen to us*”, says Lulama, one of the dwellers. (*Personal interview, March 2020*) “*We strike because the problems are responded faster*”, explains Patricia, another resident of Magangeni (*Personal interview, March 2020*).

These claimed spaces have ultimately led to increased participation with the municipality, shown in the production of Memorandums of Understanding (MoU) on some occasions. “*We first strike or rally… Then, if we are heard, our committee sits on the table with the municipality to see if we can agree on a memorandum of understanding”*, adds Nyeletti *(Personal interview, March 2020).* For Nikiwe, on several occasions, MoU has been prioritised over protesting, “*Before we met the people of UTFS, we used to strike on the streets and expressed how we felt… but after 2014, things changed. There was a time that the researcher from UTFS told us, ‘Running on the streets won’t help you, but sitting on the table and having views, will help you’. Then we came across thinking… ‘Oh, this person is right’. And now… if we have a problem… of let’s say solid waste… as we know the different stakeholders involved in the area, we sit down and address the problem. After that, we will say ‘Oh, we are solving the problem… ok… alright…’ That’s how it goes”* (*Personal interview, March 2020*). When consulted on their preferred way to pressure those in power and get their voice heard, most of the Magangeni area committee members answered it was by asking for a meeting with municipality officers. When the same question was asked to settlers of Magangeni who did not participate in the area committee, the vast majority replied it was through strikes and protests in the streets. The area committee has tried to create space of ‘power with’ the municipality while at the same time trying to exert ‘power over’ the rest of the dwellers to convince them that co-produced spaces of participation can help them obtain better results. These differences between the area committee and Magangeni dwellers who are not part of the committee have raised several questions and challenges for Magangeni organising, as explained in the following chapters.

However, we cannot understand spaces of power as something static. For Gaventa (2016, p.27), “We must remember that these spaces (closed, invited, and claimed spaces) exist in dynamic relationship to one another and are constantly opening and closing through struggles for legitimacy and resistance, co-optation and transformation”. In that sense, spaces of power should continuously be assessed in relation to the other spaces surrounding them. As discussed in the Analysis section, they might also change and vary depending on different perspectives and experiences. The following section addresses the third dimension of Gaventa’s framework, namely forms of power in Magangeni. In so doing, it continues the reflection on how the different power dimensions are interrelated and dynamic, therefore constantly changing and depending on the context in which they are analysed.

*5.1.3 Forms of power*

The different forms of power in Gaventa’s framework are divided into three categories: visible, hidden, and invisible. According to the scholar (2006), the visible form includes the definable aspect of political power, namely formal rules, structures, and decision-making procedures. The hidden form would relate to the power exerted by groups or institutions who, out of view, set the political agendas, control who is part of the decision-making and what is included on the agenda. The third form is invisible power; this form shapes meanings and defines what should be considered ‘normal’ or acceptable. For the scholar, “by influencing how individuals think about their place in the world, invisible forms of power shapes people’s beliefs, sense of self and acceptance of the *status quo* – even their own superiority or inferiority. Processes of socialisation, culture and ideology perpetuate exclusion and inequality by defining what is normal, acceptable and safe” (ibid., p.29).

*5.1.3.1 Visible forms of power*

Magangeni informal settlement organises through an area committee representing a visible form of power at a community level. The committee follows formal rules, structures, and decision-making procedures that previous committees have created. It is formed by 18 members, with equally represented men and women. Apart from the chairperson, the committee is constituted by a deputy chairperson, a speaker, a secretary, and deputy secretaries. The rest of the members are responsible for specific areas, such as Health, Education, and Employment. There is also a prosecutor in charge of informing the chairperson of any member of the wider community breaking the law. The area committee of Magangeni includes representatives of the four different sections of the settlement, namely Rhangani 1, Rhangani 2, Michipisi, and Mahuntsi. As one of the committee representatives stated, they will contact the committee chairperson when they have a problem. *“If the people have fights… let’s say during the night… they will come the following day to tell the chairperson they were fighting. The chairperson will ask them to go and tell the story to one of the secretaries of the committee. The secretary will write all that the dwellers have to say. After that, the secretary has to go back to the chairperson and inform the people involved and the problem that needs to be solved. Then we will sit, as the area committee, and look at how this story needs to be solved… We will then call the people involved in the fight. We will sit down with them and have a conversation… If they must apologise to each other, or forgive each other, they will … Everyone has a problem... but we need to learn to live together, and life goes on... So, we solve the problems like that” (Personal interview, February 2020).* Another committee representative remembers an incident where the area committee intervened against the community will. *“Members of the community came to us and told us they wanted to beat a dweller because he was stealing from them… It was tough, but we had to close that door. We said ‘no, it is not in our hands’. As an area committee, we are not protected by anyone... but we need to be strong. We stand together and said ‘no. We´re not going to beat this person’... And we call this person’s family to come and take this boy off them. Then they came and took their boy…and solved the problem within their family” (Personal interview, February 2020).*

In this context, the visible forms of power can be identified at the national and neighbourhood level and a micro-level within the informal settlement. The informal settlement committee’s power (to decide ‘over’ others) is determined ‘within’ the committee and ‘for’ the community. And while it is not against the law to disobey the committee’s decisions, most dwellers comply with the described rules and procedures. In that sense, the Magangeni committee would count with a bottom-up legitimacy coming from the informal settlement dwellers. Being heard and respected in their decisions, the area committee would play an active role in how the subalterns self-organise in Magangeni. Their role in self-organising and how and to what extent the committee deals with sensitive issues affecting the informal settlement organising are further discussed in the following chapter. In so doing, the household level -which may be outside of the public sphere but still shapes what occurs within it-will be incorporated as a fourth level of power because of its relevance to the chapter’s topic.

*5.1.3.2 Hidden forms of power*

Hidden forms of power refer to the groups setting the political agenda and controlling who is at the table for the decision-making (Gaventa, 2006). Here is where advocacy strategies intend to influence how the agenda is shaped to increase the visibility and legitimacy of the demands of a specific group of individuals. In Magangeni informal settlement, advocacy strategies include partnerships with UTFS, good communication channels with specific municipality officers, and being part of the Community of Innovation of the River Rehabilitation Project. Since UTFS started its first project in Magangeni in 2014, the university has played a crucial role as an intermediary between the informal settlement and Langutani municipality. As previously explained in this chapter, one female UTFS researcher has operated as a ‘bridge’ between the municipality and the informal settlement, promoting ‘power with’, ‘power within’, and ‘power for’ the community.

The UTFS researcher explains, *“These ‘bridges’ depending on different informal settlements are sometimes NGOs, sometimes an international donor, or like in this case, UTFS… Whether it is because of a position of power, because of our personality, or because of any other reason, we assume that position.” (Personal interview, February 2020).* Khensani, who is part of the Magangeni research group, also recalls the importance of the UTFS researcher on increasing the visibility of the informal settlement demands. *“Now whenever we have a problem or face a challenge in the settlement, we immediately call her (UTFS researcher) … and then, the problem is sorted. We even have a WhatsApp group with her, where she informs us whenever there are going to be heavy rains so that those who live by the edge of the river can evacuate… We no longer call our ward councillor because that is useless”. (Personal interview, March 2020)*. The importance of the UTFS researcher is shared by Badyia, who is responsible for the upgrading informal settlement programme in Magangeni and has known her since the time he was studying at university. “*I have known her since I arrived in this city to do my undergrad… she is like a mother figure to me… and she was also involved, to some extent, in the application of Magangeni to the upgrading programme” (Personal interview, March 2020)*. As Nikiwe, -a member of both Magangeni sub-ward committee and Magangeni research group - concludes, *“She will always be there for us. That is what we tell ourselves. Even if she retires, even if we move from Magangeni… we have her contact number, and she will always be there for us” (Personal interview, March 2020).*

As stated by several participants throughout this work, the active role of the UTFS researcher has allowed the dwellers to build closer relationships with specific municipality officers through direct channels of communication. However, the dwellers understand that one officer of one municipality department cannot help them solve all their challenges. The power dwellers have ‘with’ some municipality departments is not always shared by other departments that oversee ‘power over’ informal settlements through eviction and eradication. As a member of the Environmental Department of Langutani municipality explains, *“When people see that you are coming from the municipality, they think you know everything about the city… everything about water, electricity, waste… they even think that we can help in terms of the law enforcement… but those are functions that are sitting outside of our department… which we have got no control of. You might find that our catchment is not even a priority for them. Those are issues we must battle with. But it does not stop us from engaging with different departments in the municipality, from trying to bring them to participate in the project” (Personal interview, March 2020)”.*

*5.1.3.3 Invisible forms of power*

Invisible forms of power shape meanings and define what should be considered ‘normal’ or acceptable. For Gaventa (2006, p.29), change strategies in this area should “target social and political culture as well as individual consciousness to transform the way people perceive themselves and those around them, and how they envisage future possibilities and alternatives”. Mkateko, a Magangeni female dweller in her thirties, comments she frequently faces discrimination and denigration because of living in an informal settlement. “*People think that if you stay in shacks, you are a crook or you are not a right person… in the head. Or you are a dirty thing... And they always think that if the shack is not straight, you are like the shack. If your shack is built with metal that is rusted… they say your mind has also got rusted. But the people that stay in the shacks… we have dreams. We only came here for a better life. We are looking for jobs… we are also looking for better places where we can build our houses. We dream of having a better life, just like anybody else…*” *(Personal interview, February 2020)*

These levels of ‘othering’ and discrimination were also experienced at the CoI quarterly meeting of the River Rehabilitation Project. When discussing the challenges of a flood that affected Magangeni in April 2019, a neighbour of a high-income residential area suggested that the natural hazard-in which many dwellers lost their houses- “*shouldn’t be considered a flood, because it only affected a very small area of this city, where people should not be living*”. The meeting continued after a Magangeni dweller complained because the municipality was not collecting the garbage of the place. The settler explained: “*We are clean people living in clean houses… but we cannot keep the area clean because the municipality doesn’t collect the garbage, so we have no other option than throwing it to the river”*. The neighbour of the high-income residential area replied: “*They shouldn’t collect your garbage because you don’t have formal jobs and don’t pay for taxes, like the rest of the inhabitants in the city do. I get my garbage collected because I pay taxes” (CoI quarterly meeting, 6 March 2020).* When asked for her opinion after the end of the session, Nikiwe said: *“It is so devastating, but people are like that. They keep the same way. When she said that statement, I was like ‘Oh my God’… I said ‘Yeah, this people still exist’” (Personal interview, March 2020).*

The nature of the norms and assumptions of the neighbour/taxpayer on who deserves what, when, and how, can arguably be linked back not only to the divisions created during the apartheid but to the neoliberal system implemented since the return of democracy in the 1990s. As discussed in the section on levels of power at the beginning of this chapter, the privatisation of basic services in the country, such as water and electricity, had catastrophic repercussions for the impoverished. As the authorities widely imposed a prepaid system on marginalised communities, those unable to pay were ‘disconnected’. Especially among the marginalised in the urban context, many would find it challenging to live and work within the market discipline, seeking alternative or ‘informal’ relations in production, trade, and housing. Yet, the government aimed to secure ‘formal’ housing to all, eradicating informal settlements and pointing informality as something that had to be corrected. And while the Government eventually had to change their approach, the idea that informality is wrong and must be eradicated is still shared by part of the South African population.

Finally, invisible forms of power are also present within the organising of Magangeni. Despite the area committee being equally represented in numbers by men and women, testimonies of a wide range of dwellers raised different forms of gender inequality in the settlement. Yet, these gender-based norms cannot be considered unique to Magangeni, as they also reflect societal based norms that dwellers bring with them into the Magangeni committee. As further analysed in Chapter VI, invisible and hidden forms of power contrast with visible forms of power at different levels, starting from the micro-level within the informal settlement. In the same vein, women will also have to face challenges in claiming spaces of participation in both the informal settlement and the committee.

The following section analyses the levels, spaces, and forms of power in which the various stakeholders involved in Magangeni informal settlement interact. Gaventa (2021) states that it is challenging for any group or individual to work across all these levels, spaces, and forms alone or at once. Therefore, for the scholar, critical is how to build alliances that can work across these dimensions in concert, recognising that such partnerships can often be filled with power divisions and conflicts. This would also involve further understanding the intermediaries' role, which can connect the different power dimensions across the cube. In that sense, the analysis section discusses how the power dynamics are related, hence are meant to constantly re-define and affect each other. Consequently, the analysis section uses a power/interest grid to examine to what extent the stakeholders’ involvement can affect Magangeni informal settlement. By combining this tool to the power cube framework, this research intends to address one of the problems attributed to Gaventa´s framework: understanding where the power comes from and how sources of power can be shifted or gained. According to Pantazidou (2012, p.9), “The power cube helps to look at the forms, spaces and levels of power that enable and constrain action; however, it does not invite an explicit focus on actors and their relationships”. For the scholar, combining different power analysis tools might also help develop more nuanced answers to how and who experiences powers at different levels, what kind of power is being exercised, and how actors are enabled or constrained by that power. Gaventa (2019) also recognises that his power cube framework is not the only tool for power analysis, nor should it be, as other approaches can help focus more explicitly on actors, including stakeholder influence mapping. In that sense, while this research considers the power cube framework can be implemented as a method for strategy and action (see Chapters VI to VIII), the use of the power/interest grid intends to complement the power cube by drawing attention to the different sources of power, and how these might shift. The second part of the analysis section reflects on the term subalternity and the complexities of the subalterns organising in an informal settlement as part of a broader debate on inclusion, social justice, and participation, challenging mainstream technocratic discourses.

**5.2 Analysis**

***5.2.1 Power dynamics analysis***

In this subsection, I employ the power/interest grid developed by Mathur et al. (2007), which builds on a DfID toolkit for development activity (2002). The scholars suggest that once the different stakeholders of a programme or project are identified, they should be plotted on a grid according to how much power they exert on the intervention and how strong their interest is in that specific intervention. Depending on their levels of power and interest, the stakeholders can be grouped into those with low interest and little power, those with low interest but great power, those with high interest but little power, or those with high interest and high levels of power.

Power is often thought to be exercised in a coercive manner (domination over one another). However, alternative expressions of power have enabled community groups and organisations to see power as something positive they can also hold (Pantazidou, 2012). Yet, different scholars (Haugaard, 2012; Bradley, 2020; VeneKlasen and Miller, 2002) have also highlighted the concepts of power ‘to’, ‘for’, ‘with’, and ‘within’ in power literature. In that sense, Gaventa (2021) summarises the multiple prepositions often used with the word power as follows. ´Power to´ would focus on the process through which people can gain control over their circumstances (usually associated with the concept of empowerment), understanding power as a potentially positive (or accumulative) sum. ‘Power with’ would refer to a more horizontal dimension to power, highlighting collective action and the ability to act together through alliances and coalitions). ‘Power within’ would emphasise a process of ‘conscientisation’ through which the subaltern –as an individual or as a group- develop a more critical understanding of the forces that shape the power over their lives; and ‘power for’ would provide a logic to transformative power through strategies and alternatives that can help to build the blocks for a sustained change. This research understands that the existing expressions of power are interrelated and can help explain the power dynamics affecting Magangeni informal settlement. By applying these concepts to the power cube framework and the power/interest grid, this work intends to understand power not only as a way of domination (‘power over’), but also as a possibility for the subalterns to challenge that domination (‘power to, for, with, and within’) understanding the complexities of power dynamics and acknowledging that stakeholders' levels of interest and power are not fixed categories. Figure 5C plots Magangeni main actors on the power/interest grid.

*Figure 5C: Magangeni stakeholders on a power/interest grid*



(Power/Interest Grid adapted from DfID, 2002; Mathur et al., 2007)

***Langutani municipality***

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Levels of power involved** | **Spaces of power involved** | **Forms of power involved** |
| Municipal/Neighbourhood | Closed/ Invited | Visible |

According to the grid, this is the most powerful stakeholder with more power on the grid. This is because they have the final say on what is done in the area, and most of the time, they oversee the rest of the actors. The levels of interest will differ depending on the different departments of the municipality. There are those highly interested (Department of Human Settlements/Upgrading of Informal Settlements Programme), those recently invited to take part in the interventions (Department of Water and Sanitation), and others who are still not involved in any project, as Magangeni is not a priority for them (Department of Electricity and others). As emerged from the findings, Langutani municipality has had both repressive and transformative forms of addressing informal settlements in the city over the last two decades. On the one hand, the Department of Land Invasion sees informal housing as a technical issue requiring technical solutions. Accordingly, it attempts to evict new builds to control the expansion of informal houses across the city within closed spaces of power adhering to the legal framework and with no intention of including others. On the other hand, the Department of Human Settlements supports a more collaborative approach with the community. In that sense, Langutani municipality invited other individuals and organisations to participate in the RRP. In so doing, they arguably aimed to increase their legitimacy and address sustainable processes, locality development and empowerment (Pilisuk et al. 1996; Brett, 2003; Brown, 2005; Kilby, 2006). According to the empirical material drawn from the Findings, the municipality intends to listen to the voices of the subalterns and potentially incorporate them into the decision-making.

***Ward 14 Committee***

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Levels of power involved** | **Spaces of power involved** | **Forms of power involved** |
| Municipal/ Neighbourhood | Closed | Visible |

In theory, Ward 14 Committee represents the formal communication channel between Magangeni informal settlement and Langutani municipality. However, according to the participants, the communication between the ward committee and the settlement is poor. Magangeni does not feel represented by the ward and considers they are rarely heard. Arguably because of political party discrepancies, the Magangeni area committee prefers to negotiate directly with the municipality or with UTFS as an intermediary. The ward councillor represents the Democratic Alliance (DA), and Magangeni leaders have been historically related to the ANC. In that sense, the participants argued that the councillor would have less interest in Magangeni because he knew he would not count on their votes for future elections. Besides, by law, ward representatives can be consulted by municipalities but cannot be part of the decision-making. Hence Ward 14 appears on the grid with low interest and little power in Magangeni.

The initiative of implementing ward committees was claimed to be unique in the world (Piper and Deacon, 2009), as it allowed the local community to participate and engage with the municipality in running their affairs. However, implementing these committees would also narrow formal routes to participation in South Africa. Smith and de Visser (2009) examined that most municipalities now rely on ward committees as the only legitimate channel for engaging community members, de-legitimising any other instance or terms through which the community would prefer to participate. Furthermore, the Guidelines section on “Function and power of ward committees” explicitly mentions that “no executive powers should be delegated to ward committee members” (South African Government, 2005, page 6). In that sense, Magangeni informal settlement faces a threefold challenge regarding ‘formal participation’ through ward committees. Firstly, there are no members of Magangeni representing the informal settlement in Ward 14. Secondly, communication between Magangeni and the councillor of Ward 14 is weak. Thirdly, Ward 14 (as every other ward in South Africa) does not have decisional powers, and formally they have only an advisory role. In other words, wards’ representation and participation have been far from what was initially expected to be a progressive approach to South Africa's participatory governance. Specifically, in Ward 14, Magangeni informal settlement appears not to participate. As emerged from the findings, the communication with the ward councillor is poor, and the settlers do not feel their voice is being heard.

***Conservancy Groups (NGOs and private sector-waste collection and river management)***

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **Levels of power involved** | **Spaces of power involved** | **Forms of power involved** |
| Municipal/ Neighbourhood | Invited | Visible |

Local NGOs and conservancy groups are highly interested in the river area. However, Magangeni represents only a small fraction of that area, so the settlement is not the highest priority of their intervention. They do have projects linked to Magangeni but mainly related to river management. Their main aim (as discussed earlier in the findings section) is to see communities thrive in balance with the habitats around them, driving awareness and active involvement in protecting and restoring land and river environments. Sustainable strategies include litter removal and litter booms' installation as an interim approach to in-stream and waste collection, river management, land care, and restoration interventions. In 2016, private sector conservancy groups presented a project to rehabilitate the rivers in each of the 17 catchments in the Langutani municipality. The initiative intended to restore the condition of the rivers of the region through various strategies, including cleaning of invasive alien species and mobilising the communities to take responsibility for the health of the stretch of river that they live on. Arguably, interlinked with environmental goals was a view of sustainability that understands economic, environmental, and social concerns as intersecting in the practices of the subalterns in urban areas (Boyer et al., 2016) (see section 3.1). As further addressed in Chapters VI to VIII, the organising of informal settlement dwellers in Magangeni is affected by the land they use in a geographically and sensitive area; by the political and economic world order in which they exist; and by the considerable loss, shock, and human suffering they are exposed to because of all the above. For this purpose, private conservancy groups and NGOs invited each community to present their candidates to volunteer for this work. In 2020, community members of Magangeni were invited to apply, complete a form, and start a training process that would end with selecting four volunteers to represent the Magangeni settlement. Unfortunately, due to the Covid-19 outbreak, the process had to be interrupted.

***Magangeni Research Group***

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **Levels of power involved** | **Spaces of power involved** | **Forms of power involved** |
| Municipal/ Neighbourhood | Invited | Invisible |

“When the RRP *[River Rehabilitation Project]* was established in 2014, the UTFS researchers argued, in their initial meetings with the Langutani Water and Sanitation Unit (LWS) from Langutani Municipality, that it was critical to co-produce knowledge on the catchment with community-based organisations using participatory approaches if resilient and sustainable water and climate governance was to be built” (Sutherland et al., 2019, p.12). During that same 2014, UTFS started working in Magangeni informal settlement. Since then, the data co-produced between researchers and informal settlers in Magangeni informal settlement include baseline data with the history and geography of the settlement, community-based and participatory Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping, the development of a ‘climate-smart informal settlement handbook’, and participation in the development of the city’s Resilience Strategy with the local municipality.

There are six representatives of Magangeni informal settlement who regularly attend the CoI meetings. They were invited to participate by UTFS. They all volunteered for a research group formed by UTFS in 2014. Arguably, the most important collaborative project of UTFS and the team of researchers of Magangeni is one of ‘datafication’ that has been in place since 2014. The project forms part of the River Rehabilitation Project (RRP). Its main aim was to increase the ‘visibility’ of the informal settlement through participatory data collection and production (Sutherland et al., 2019). The research group has shown high interest and commitment in the different projects they are invited to participate in. They are recognised and validated by the Magangeni committee too. While the RRP stakeholders and Langutani municipality hear their voices, one specific UTFS researcher (who invited them to participate) usually mediates between them and the municipality. Their spaces of power are typically invited and not claimed. The group works voluntarily and only receives funding from UTFS when they need to use transport to attend their activities.

In the previous section, one of the participants described to what extent and how Magangeni dwellers face discrimination and denigration because of living in an informal settlement. These levels of ‘othering’ and discrimination were also experienced at the CoI quarterly meeting of the River Rehabilitation Project. This discrimination mostly comes from neighbours of high-income residential areas who also participate in the CoI meetings and consider informality as something wrong and unlawful, as opposed to formality. These beliefs could arguably be attributed to the use of language and housing policies implemented by the South African government after the return of democracy. According to Meth (2020), the housing policy of informal settlement eradication in South Africa assumed and extended the country's discursive divide between formality and informality. As examined in Chapter II, and arguably associated with the history of apartheid, the South African government intended to eradicate informal settlements moved by a genuine desire to overcome and respond to the historical inequalities of segregation and dispossession in the country (Braathen et al., 2014).

Informal housing was seen as a deviation from the norm. In that sense, the country's housing policies of the beginning of the 2000s focused on the physical, economic, political, and social differences between informal housing and formal housing. Theoretically, the processes of housing formalisation were aimed to help obtain social change, assuming higher levels of dignity and equality for dwellers and their families as possible outcomes (Braathen et al., 2014; Meth, 2020). Those levels of dignity and equality would be questioned by some high-income neighbours who consider Magangeni dwellers not to have the same rights as them. For Meth (2020), the South African housing policies of the beginning of the 2000s denigrated informality justifying its eradication, and valued formality and the properties of formal housing. Nonetheless, the language around the formal/ informal dichotomy began to change over the last few years. The government assumed it would not meet the housing delivery targets. It shifted its policies to upgrading ‘informal settlements’, focusing on providing services, rather than merely on eradication (Braathen et al., 2014). In other words, they moved from suggesting informal housing was unacceptable to acknowledging a more significant role for informality. This would partly explain Langutani municipality’s approach towards co-production of knowledge and inviting Magangeni to the decision-making table. Consequently, this research incorporates ‘subaltern urbanism’ (see section 2.2) as a paradigm that discards the differentiation between the legal and illegal, the formal and informal, for considering them arbitrary and a site of considerable power and violence (Roy, 2011). Instead, it intends to recognise informal settlements as a terrain of habitation, livelihood and politics that often remain neglected in urban and organisational theory.

***Magangeni Area Sub-Committee***

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **Levels of power involved** | **Spaces of power involved** | **Forms of power involved** |
| Municipal/ Neighbourhood | Claimed/ Invited | Visible |

Arguably, the stakeholders with the highest interest in the development of Magangeni informal settlement is the Magangeni area sub-committee. They formally represent the dwellers and raise their main concerns to local authorities. They oversee the settlement and allow any programme, project, or research to occur in Magangeni, representing a visible form of power in the community. In theory, they have more power than the Magangeni research group. According to the participants, most of the time, Magangeni area sub-committee claims spaces of power against those in power (the ward committee and, mainly, the municipality). As examined in Chapter III, from the early 2000s, the most popular form of claiming spaces of power for informal settlements in South Africa has been through ‘service-delivery’ protests. In this context, strategies have included the construction of barricades, election boycotts, processions, and *toyi-toying* (a South African dance used in political protest that includes foot stamping) (Braathen et al. 2014). These actions have been described as ‘popcorn protests’, as they rapidly pop up and subside (Mottiar, 2013). In Magangeni, the actions taken by settlers can be interpreted as everyday acts of resistance to local authorities, such as illegally connecting to electricity and water services and protesting in the streets

As emerged from the Findings, when consulted on their preferred way to pressure those in power and get their voice heard, most of the Magangeni area committee members answered it was by asking for a meeting with municipality officers and agreeing on a memorandum of understanding. When the same question was asked to settlers of Magangeni who do not participate in the area committee, the vast majority replied it was through strikes and protests in the streets. These differences between the area committee and Magangeni dwellers who are not part of the committee have raised several questions and challenges for Magangeni organising. What eventually starts as a claimed space of power sometimes shift to co-produced spaces in which the municipality and the informal settlement agree on common terms in a memorandum of understanding. This, in turn, may bring dissensus between the Magangeni dwellers and the area committee and ultimately a lack of trust in the representatives. However, as examined throughout this work, spaces of power exist in dynamic relationships and hence can coexist (Gaventa, 2016; Mitlin, 2018). In that sense, it is not that invited spaces of power have replaced strategies of claimed spaces in Magangeni. As examined in Chapter III, informal settlements can enter into conflict and collaborate with the local government. The ability to do both will come from the openness of communities to this contradiction and the understanding that conflict and dissensus are central to the practice of organisations (DeFilippis et al., 2007). Accordingly, by using both strategies, some of the participants feel they have played an active role in the agenda-setting and decision-making to improve the living standards of Magangeni. As one of the sub-committee representatives affirms, *“Years ago, we didn’t have a chance to sit with municipality officers. Now we have the chance to express how we feel about the place where we stay… and that opens our minds to the fact that we can also ask for more… for what we need. There is a slogan that Mr Zuma (Jacob, former President) used to say… ‘If we work together, we can make a change’… I can say things are a bit better since we work together” (Personal interview, March 2020).*

***UTFS***

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Levels of power involved** | **Spaces of power involved** | **Forms of power involved** |
| Municipal/ Neighbourhood | Invited/ Claimed | Visible/ Hidden |

This is one of the stakeholders with the highest interest in the informal settlement. They have worked and researched in Magangeni for more than five years. A UTFS researcher has been working in the settlement since 2014 and acts as an intermediary between the municipality and the informal settlement, promoting ‘power with’, ‘power within’, and ‘power for’ the community. She is known and respected by all the stakeholders involved in the River Rehabilitation Project. After Langutani municipality, it is arguably the stakeholder with the highest power in Magangeni. They are part of the decision-making and consulted before implementing almost any project in the settlement.

The UTFS researcher advocates influencing how the agenda is shaped to increase the visibility and legitimacy of Magangeni dwellers’ demands, which could arguably be considered a hidden form of power (Gaventa, 2006). As Pantazidou (2012) explains, hidden forms of power do not always need to be resisted or challenged. In this case, if the subalterns of Magangeni are trying to achieve sustainable or visible change in terms of being heard, they can use the hidden power of connections to achieve their aim. Similarly, Magangeni dwellers could use that hidden power to get access to information about job opportunities, funding, or other needs that the ward councillor would not inform due to their poor channels of communication. Yet, the role of UTFS would also respond to what Gaventa (2021) identifies as visible forms of power, as they are part of the table where formal rules, structures and procedures operate. In that sense, UTFS participates in the process and invites Magangeni informal settlement to the table to make the process more accountable.

According to the UTFS researcher, the position of power that situates her as a valid voice to the municipality could be attributed to her contacts in the municipality or her whiteness. As a participant researcher, she was deeply reflective about her position and the power and privilege associated with these, and she has aimed to use them in favour of the informal settlement needs. For Oakley et al. (2020), assumed and held power and privilege of qualitative researchers can be part of the rationale to develop methods to redress power imbalances. Yet, according to the scholars, in getting to know participants, “the feeling of responsibility towards them can grow further as can feelings of guilt and anxiety about the research process of findings” (p.18). For the UTFS researcher, there was no such tension as her experience provided her with strategies both in terms of research design and in managing the impact of emotional research studies regarding Magangeni informal settlement.

As examined in the methodology chapter, my relationship with the UTFS researcher also situated me, as a researcher, in a privileged position in which I could access the CoI meetings, interview the representatives, ask for more information, and contrast perspectives of the different participants. Without the help of the UTFS researcher, I would most probably have had limited access to the data I needed for this study.

This subsection has, so far, plotted the diverse stakeholders involved in Magangeni on a power/interest grid. Whilst it acknowledged the complexities of including a wide range of actors involved in the short term and long-term initiatives on the same grid, its main aim was to identify levels of engagement and power imbalances between all these different stakeholders. The River Rehabilitation Project (RRP) is an example of how municipal and neighbourhood levels of power can interrelate. Besides, the RRP also demonstrates how different expressions of power can coexist. Langutani municipality has led a collective action through alliances and partnerships with conservancy groups, UTFS, Magangeni informal settlement dwellers, and groups of neighbours around the area (‘power with’), recognising that such alliances are often themselves filled with power divisions and conflicts (Gaventa, 2021). UTFS has also helped in the process of ‘power to’ Magangeni research group to gain control over their circumstances and potentially achieve transformative and sustained change (’power for’).

By participating at the same table with stakeholders who have exercised ‘power over’ them, Magangeni dwellers were also able to experience and develop a critical understanding of the forces that had shaped power over their lives (‘power within’). As previously addressed in this chapter, the national government has had discriminatory housing policies toward informal settlements in the past. The local government (municipality) also still has eviction plans for informal settlements in the area. The empirical material described in this chapter illustrates how national and municipal levels can simultaneously exert ‘power over’ the neighbourhood and ‘power with’ the neighbourhood.

This chapter has discussed the empirical work provided in the findings using the power cube framework and the power/interest grid. By combining these different power analysis tools to analyse the RRP, this section aimed to develop more nuanced answers to how and who experiences powers at different levels, what kind of power is being exercised in different spaces, and how actors are enabled or constrained by the different forms of power. Overall, the RRP provides an example of how the three dimensions interrelate and how different strategies to address each of those dimensions can affect the other two. The second part of the analysis reflects on the term subalternity linking the findings of this chapter to the debates of the existent literature. In so doing, it aims to address the organising of the subalterns as part of a debate on inclusion, social justice, and participation. Consequently, it reflects on heterogeneity as a critical characteristic of the subalterns. Furthermore, it highlights the gaps in MOS literature regarding subalternity, and how this thesis aims to deal with those gaps by drawing on the voices of the subalterns.

***5.2.2 Subaltern Analysis: Difference in Magangeni and the gaps in MOS***

*5.2.2.1 Difference in Magangeni informal settlement*

A key point in Spivak’s work (1988) is her critique of the Subaltern Studies Group for its tendency to homogenise or “essentialise” subaltern experience. In other words, she rejects the idea of considering the experience of all subalterns to be essentially the same because the colonised subaltern subject would be irretrievably heterogeneous. For the scholar, rather than a single subaltern voice, there would be many different subaltern voices and positions. This thesis examines the different and heterogeneous actors involved in Magangeni informal settlement's power dynamics. In so doing, it aims to contribute to a debate on the complexities and different understandings involved in informal settlement organising.

Drawing on the work of the Subaltern Studies Group (see Chapter III), Roy (2011) interrogates the epistemological meaning of subalternity. Relevant here is what Chaterjee (2004) defines as ‘political society’, a ‘popular politics’ which involves claims to habitation and livelihood by groups of people whose very livelihood or habitation (i.e., informal settlements) would involve violation of the law. In so doing, her interest is to “break with ontological and topological understandings of subalternity. In the broadest sense, *[the scholar is]* interested in the following question: how can we understand the inevitable heterogeneity of Southern urbanism, that which cannot be contained within the familiar metonymic categories of megacity or slum, and that which cannot be worlded through the ‘colonial wound’?” (Roy, 2011, p.231). In other words, the scholar seeks to understand and transform how the cities of the Global South are studied and represented in urban research. Consequently, her main aim is to challenge dystopian narratives of informal settlements (or slums) by addressing their ‘spaces of poverty’ as a terrain of habitation, livelihood, self-organisation, and politics. In that sense, Roy (2011) suggests subaltern urbanism should challenge fixed notions of informality and discard the differentiation of urban studies between the legal and illegal, the authorised and the unauthorised, for considering them arbitrary and a site of considerable power and violence.

In the same vein, Banks et al. (2020) argue for a shift away from seeing urban informality narrowly as a setting (i.e., in which groups would secure livelihoods or commodities) or as a sector (i.e., housing or labour markets) to a site of critical analysis to understand the ways that processes underpinning economic, social, and political inequality might emerge and perpetuate in specific urban contexts. What Banks et al. propose is to examine social and political relationships between the state and multiple sets of actors across economic, spatial, and political domains within them (i.e., state-society interactions and changing state attitudes to informality, and the significance of different actors’ agency within both formality and informality). In other words, what the scholars suggest is to move “beyond an analysis of low-income and marginalised groups that rely on informal activities, resources, and relationships for their shelter, political, and economic needs, to instead carry out a differentiated analysis of the actors operating within the spaces of urban informality” (p.233).

This chapter has introduced who are the subalterns in Magangeni informal settlement and how they adopt different identities and ways of organising when relating to other stakeholders involved in the area. Consequently, a Magangeni committee representative could be subjugated and discriminated against by the ward, by the municipality, and by the neighbours of high-income residential areas, and at the same time subjugate, discriminate, and oppress an informal settlement dweller because of kinship or gender. In that sense, not all the ‘informals’ would face the same challenges, and not all the subalterns would suffer the same levels of oppression and subjugation. As examined in the following chapters, women in Magangeni face different struggles than men, and undocumented immigrants face other challenges than South African nationals. Their subjugation will be particular to the identities they adopt and to the situations they face. This, in turn, will be affected by the role, the relative power, and the interest of the different stakeholders involved in Magangeni informal settlement. Moreover, Magangeni would adopt different strategies and ways of self-organising according to the situation and the stakeholders involved. As addressed in Chapter III, self-organising in an informal setting is dynamic and can change. Consequently, this chapter has acknowledged that collaborative, contentious, and subversive strategies coexist and that multiple identities and shifting alliances can all be part of the diverse politics of Magangeni informal settlement. Dwellers will claim spaces of power and form part of invited spaces of participation, depending on the context. Furthermore, most of the dwellers will comply with the rules and procedures set by the area committee, arguably legitimising a bottom-up approach. Yet, the following chapters will examine the existent tensions between the dwellers and the area committee when dealing with specific issues that could eventually perpetuate the subjugation of different subaltern groups within the informal settlement.

**5.3. Conclusion**

Using the power cube framework as a context analysis method, this chapter identified and examined the different stakeholders affecting Magangeni power dynamics, its multiple alliances, and the extent to which this can alter or perpetuate the factors of subjugation subalterns face. It suggested that if the subalterns of Magangeni intend to challenge the relations that cause their subordination, they might need to build multiple strategies linked to aligning all three dimensions of power, understanding its nuances and complexities. Just as those who study the Rubik cube argue there are billions of different positions that the blocks of the cube may have, analysing power dynamics using Gaventa’s power cube framework can help to identify and explain the variations and complexities in which power can take across levels, spaces, and forms in an informal settlement (Gaventa, 2006). Consequently, the findings of this chapter conclude that power dimensions in Magangeni informal settlement are interrelated and dynamic, therefore constantly changing and depending on the context and situation in which they are analysed.

To discuss how and to what extent the different power dynamics interrelate, this chapter introduced how the municipality and the neighbourhood connected and worked in partnership as part of the River Rehabilitation Project (RRP) to protect and restore the land and river environment. As part of the city’s Resilience Strategy, the Department of Human Settlement in Langutani Municipality adopted a collaborative approach in which different stakeholders were invited to the table. Among those stakeholders was UTFS, which conducted research in the area since 2014. In line with their participatory approach to research and social change, UTFS asked the municipality to invite Magangeni dwellers to participate in the decision-making. The power and privilege of the UTFS researcher -arguably due to her whiteness or her contacts in the municipality- allowed her to suggest and incorporate stakeholders into the table. Her power and privilege in both the municipality and the informal settlement allowed me as a researcher to get access to the informal settlement and to the participants who took part in this research, too (see discussion on my positionality in the Methodology chapter).

Arguably, including Magangeni dwellers in the RRP would help to address an alternative view of sustainability, understanding economic, environmental, and social concerns as intersecting in the practices and perspectives of the subalterns in urban areas (Boyer et al. 2016) and as part of a broader debate on inclusion, social justice, and participation of informal settlement dwellers. However, the UTFS invitation to Magangeni to be part of the table also brought several tensions addressed throughout the power cube framework in this chapter. While Langutani’s Department of Human Settlement accepted Magangeni as part of the CoI holders in the RRP and was piloting a partnership-based model of incremental settlement upgrading (about to start in Magangeni before the outbreak of Covid-19), Langutani’s Department of Land Invasion continued evicting new builds in different informal settlements in the area. Furthermore, while Magangeni was part of the RRP, communication with the ward councillor, which was supposed to be the formal communication channel with the municipality, was almost inexistent. Accordingly, while being part of the RRP, Magangeni dwellers did not stop claiming their needs throughout claimed spaces of participation. Magangeni dwellers sat at the table with Langutani municipality for some projects (i.e., RRP) but protested and barricaded on the streets to ask the municipality for better access to basic services such as water and electricity. In that sense, Magangeni informal settlement enters into conflict and collaborate with the local government. Magangeni was heard by some Langutani municipality departments but silenced by others. They communicated well with some municipal officers but not with the ward councillor who represented them in the municipality. Arguably, the ability to do all these would come from the openness of the informal settlement to these contradictions and the understanding that conflict and dissensus are central to the practice of organising (DeFilippis et al. 2007).

This chapter also reflected on heterogeneity as a critical characteristic of the subalterns. By addressing difference in Magangeni, this thesis aims to contribute to the discussion of informal settlements as a terrain of livelihood, self-organisation and politics, where different power dynamics take place, different identities are adopted, and different types of subjugation are experienced. It also highlighted the gaps in MOS literature regarding the subalterns and how this thesis aims to deal with those gaps by drawing on the voices of the subalterns. Consequently, the tensions and contradictions of the power dynamics of the subalterns’ organising introduced in this chapter aimed to contribute to new conceptual and empirical knowledge on the relationship between power dynamics, organisational practices of the subalterns, and social change in informal settlements. While the power dynamics of the subalterns organising in Magangeni is my primary research topic, there are three issues related to the subalterns organising in the informal settlement that the co-researchers identified: gender-based violence and self-organising, covid-19, and a fire incident in October 2020. Each of these topics will be addressed in a different chapter. Each of these chapters, in turn, will include a findings section and an analysis section linking the empirical material to the existing literature. The following chapter examines gender-based violence and organising in Magangeni informal settlement. The chapter aims to contribute to new theoretical knowledge by addressing a relatively new level to Gaventa’s power cube framework, namely the household level. It highlights gender analysis at the household level and the extent to which women’s oppression can be constructed and reproduced in a particular context, an aspect that, according to literature, has not been easily applied through the power cube framework (Pantazidou, 2012; Gaventa, 2021). Consequently, it intends to contribute to new empirical knowledge on the relationship between gender-based violence, power dynamics and organisational practices of the subalterns in Magangeni informal settlement.

**Chapter VI: Gender-Based Violence and organising in Magangeni informal settlement**

*“The term ‘violence against women’ means any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life … Recognising that violence against women is a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women, which have led to domination over and discrimination against women by men and to the prevention of the full advancement of women, and that violence against women is one of the crucial social mechanisms by which women are forced into a subordinate position compared with men”*

(**Declaration of the Elimination of Violence against Women, United Nations General Assembly, 23 February 1994**)

This chapter focuses on power dynamics and subaltern informal organising, exploring events, experiences, and reflections around gender-based violence (GBV) and women organising in Magangeni informal settlement. The chapter starts with the voice of one of the co-researchers and the participants she interviewed. Between October 2020 and February 2021, Stella, both participant and co-researcher of this investigation, interviewed and had informal conversations with fifteen women living in Magangeni. Stella also conducted a focus group, captured photographs and stories related to gender-based violence, and reflected on her personal experience living in the informal settlement. Drawing on the data gathered and the co-researchers crucial support, three main challenges of being a woman in Magangeni informal settlement are identified; these revolve around physical violence, sexual violence, and safety and security. The findings section also examines the role and participation of the area committee in tackling the gender-based challenges in the informal settlement and women’s own understanding of the issues and possible solutions (see Table 6A for findings summary). The second part of this chapter, in turn, draws on the literature to inform a deeper analysis of the findings presented below. The analysis section is divided into two subsections. The first subsection examines how the identified challenges operate at different levels, spaces, and forms of power involving various stakeholders affecting gender-based violence and women’s organising in the informal settlement. Moreover, this first subsection aims to contribute to new theoretical knowledge by addressing a relatively new level to Gaventa’s power cube framework, namely the household level. The second subsection intends to contribute to new empirical knowledge on the relationship between gender-based violence, power dynamics and organisational practices of the subalterns in Magangeni informal settlement. Drawing on postcolonial, decolonial, and subaltern studies, it reflects on the notions of heterogeneity and strategic essentialism for understanding female dwellers organising in Magangeni. This subsection intends to explore women’s subalterns organising as part of a broader debate on inclusion, social justice, and participation. In that sense, it does not intend to address current discussions on gender studies literature, as those debates fall beyond the scope of this research.

*Table 6A: Summary of Findings: GBV and organising in Magangeni*

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| --- | --- |
| **Self-identified challenges** | **Main issues involved** |
| *6.1.1 Physical violence* | Intimate partner violence/ Jealousy and distrust/ Economic dependency/ Women threatened, and silenced/ Relatives and friends involved/ Neighbours affected |
| *6.1.2 Sexual violence* | Intimate partner violence / Women threatened and silenced/ Rapists from outside the settlement/ Ineffective police  |
| *6.1.3 Safety and security* | Thieves and rapists from both inside and outside the settlement/ Women living alone are more exposed/ Lack of toilets (isolated and dark cabins) |
| *6.1.4 Role and power dynamics of the area committee* | Female participants do not trust the area committee/ Apparently, the area committee protect the culprits if they come from the same area as them/ 50:50 gender ratio, is not enough/ Women excluded |

**6.1 Self-identified challenges**

*6.1.1 Physical violence*

From the interviews and other data sources gathered from Magangeni informal settlement, physical abuse of women appears to be common in the settlement. It is frequently related to acts of jealousy and distrust. For Stella, *“Many of them are cohabitating with their husbands or boyfriends, and men tend to be very dominant in relationships. Men are the ones who want to make decisions for women. The abuse starts most of the time with small arguments, like phone calls and visiting friends. Some women are used to being abused by their male partners so that they stay in those relationships and do nothing. Other women do something, but then they suffer the consequences. A friend of mine lived with her partner but asked him to leave the house because he beat her. Since then, every weekend, the man got drunk and came to my friend’s house to discuss and then beat her. On 16 November, around 7:30 pm, he took petrol and a match and burnt the house down while she was not around. Not only that house was burnt, but some other neighbours’ houses were burnt too. I remember a couple of kids who were at school got their houses burnt too. It was so quick that no one had the time to take a single thing out of their houses. The uniforms and books of the kids were burnt to ashes, and they could not write their final exams. Luckily, at that time no one died” (Interview, February 2021).* As the informal settlement is overcrowded, what happens in one shack affects those neighbours who live only meters apart. When a fire starts in a house, it rapidly spreads to other places. This problem has caused widespread damage and loss; dwellers have not only lost their homes and belongings but also their lives (see Chapter VII).

According to most research participants, these situations are not surprising as they frequently happen in Magangeni. A man beats his partner and then tells her he is sorry. He threatens her. Nobody calls the police. The woman goes to the hospital and then returns to the same house—the story repeats. *“In our informal settlement, there are plenty of cases in which boyfriends beat girlfriends, and the girl gets injured badly”*, says Thembi *(Focus group, January 2021).* From a personal experience, Ntlakuso remembers, “*My partner slapped me on my ears, and I was very close to losing my audition... His brothers then came with him to apologise. He apologised too, and I was given some money to go to the doctor. They begged me not to report this to the police. He already had criminal records, and they were afraid he could go back to jail” (Interview, November 2020).*

It is rare when a man leaves the settlement after causing injury or trauma to his partner. Of the several stories Stella heard and witnessed when collecting the data, one deeply impacted her. *“I remember the case of a woman who received a phone call around 8:30 pm. When she ended the call, her partner asked her who had called. She said her friend was checking on her because that is what friends do. Her partner didn’t believe her and asked why she had lied to him. The woman told him they could call back the number if he wanted, but he refused. He claimed that she was just cheating on him. He told her, ‘you are living in my house for free, eating food bought with my money… and all you do is cheat on me’. He was furious, so he beat her. He also took her phone and cracked it. The man locked the door so the woman couldn’t go out of the shack. He also turned on the radio, very loud, so that the people couldn’t hear them arguing. With the door locked, and the loud music, he continued beating her. The girl tried to fight back, but he dominated her. She was crying so loud that her voice started to fade. The neighbours knocked and knocked and tried to kick the door down, but it was all in vain, as the music was too loud, and the man didn’t cool down. He beat her for hours. Finally, the door cracked, and the neighbours could open it. The girl had fainted, and her partner tried to wake her up by throwing her water. But the girl wasn’t moving. The partner took his phone and hired a special car to take the girl to the hospital—no one called the police. The girl was severely bruised and injured and stayed in a coma in the hospital for a few days. It was terrible. After this episode, the man was chased out of the settlement”* (*Narrative-photovoice, December 2020*)

This story is only one of many similar stories in Magangeni. Luckily, the woman finally woke up in the hospital and returned to her house in the settlement. Other women did not have the same luck. As stated by Thembi, “*Most of the women of the informal settlement are unemployed and economically dependent on their husbands*” *(Focus group, January 2021)*. This challenge has arguably constituted one of the risk factors of intimate partner violence against women in the settlement. The lack of economic independence, the fear of reporting a case of abuse, and the threats from their partners and relatives, are further examined in the analysis section. This sub-section has identified physical violence as one of the challenges women face in Magangeni. Drawing on personal experiences and testimonies that one of the co-researchers collected, it has examined a common practice in the informal settlement. Jealousy, distrust, fear, and economic dependency partly explain these violent practices. The following section describes sexual violence as a second key challenge Stella identified for women living in Magangeni.

*6.1.2 Sexual violence*

According to research participants, women in Magangeni have been exposed to an increasing number of rapes in the last few years. *“There are many rapists who come to our settlement, break into our houses, rape women, and then run away without being seen”*, explains Hlamalani, who has lived in the informal settlement for almost ten years *(Focus group, January 2021).* For Stella, *“Many women have been victims of rape. Some victims even live with their partners and are raped by men from somewhere else. It is alleged that these rapists use burning sticks to make people sleep for hours. So, once they make sure the husband is asleep, they take him off the bed, rape the woman, and then escape. What is more painful is that these lawbreakers run away immediately” (Interview, February 2021).*

Unfortunately, there would also be rapists being protected by other male friends in the settlement. As Thembi describes, “*Women have tried calling the police to report the issue. But men from this area always take sides. When the police come, men will tell them that the woman was not raped”. (Focus group, January 2021).* According to Hlamalani, this sense of defencelessness would have caused that “*on some occasions women have had to take the law into their own hands, torturing and beating the rapist to death” (Focus group, January 2021).* An example of women’ taking the law into their own hands is described by Stella, who captured a photograph and narrated a particular story through narrative photovoice. *“That night, some people were asleep, but there was a lot of noise outside. We got up with my sister at the same time to look outside to ask what was happening. They told us they had caught a rapist. All people ran to see. Everyone wanted to see who the rapist was and how they caught him. They told us the rapist broke into the woman’s house thinking the woman was asleep. He went inside, and the woman started to scream very loud. The man escaped, but the woman told her neighbours that she had recognised who he was. The settlement men also knew this guy, so they went with her to his house… where he was pretending to be asleep. The woman recognised him, so the neighbours took him out of the house” (Stella, Narrative photovoice, November 2020).* By then, most of the neighbours were awake. Women, the elderly and even children have gathered outside the house of the rapist. People were shouting with anger. Stella continues, “*Everyone in the settlement went outside to beat up the rapist. Some were throwing stones; some were using big sticks. And while he was being beaten, many other victims recognised him and told the rest that he had also raped them. They were crying so bitterly. Some were asking for the money, phones, and other valuable things that he robbed from them. They took their anger and beat him, asking him why he had done that to them. It was so terrible because all of the victims found themselves being infected with HIV Aids.” (Stella, Narrative photovoice, November 2020)*

People were shocked. They kept beating the man who showed no resistance. “*Then the women took over and tortured the culprit. He was taken to another spot, and they dug a hole for him and put him inside. No one was calling the police because everybody was angry. The women put sticks, plastics, and cardboard inside the hole.* *The time came when someone was needed to light the fire on the man. But no one wanted to do so. Everyone was so scared to start the fire. Suddenly, the man got out of the hole and started to run away. The women got very angry, chased him, and beat him with no pity this time. People left him on the spot, and he died there. The police then came and asked questions. Having seen so many victims of this guy, they didn’t arrest anyone and took his body”. (Stella, Narrative photovoice, November 2020)*

The story started with a raped woman asking her neighbours for help. The neighbours caught the rapist, and the rest of the community beat him to death. The settlement’s men and women reacted angrily, and nobody was asked to stop beating him. When the police arrived, they asked questions and considered the rapist deserved his death. No one was arrested, and the police took the corpse. The formal organisation in the settlement, namely the sub-ward committee, did not organise this time. The formal institution, namely the police, considered no one guilty of the death of the rapist. This sub-section has introduced sexual violence as a second main challenge for women in Magangeni. As with physical violence, in sexual violence, women would be threatened and silenced. They would be exposed to rapists from both inside and outside the settlement and would arguably not have the support of effective police to protect them. Consequently, the following section presents how women participating in the research describe safety and security as the third biggest problem identified by Stella for women living in Magangeni informal settlement.

*6.1.3 Safety and security*

A few years ago, the Municipality built ablution blocks at the entrance of Magangeni as part of its upgrading informal settlements programme (UISP). The initiative contemplated washing facilities and toilets for the dwellers. Unfortunately, after a couple of months, most toilets were not working. From those still in use, only one was set aside for the women of the settlement. For Xiluva, the situation worsened amidst the Covid-19 pandemic. *“When people lost their jobs because of the lockdown, the situation got even worse. There were too many people and only one toilet we could use” (Focus group, January 2021).* Toilet issues represent a problem for the women of Magangeni in terms of hygiene and safety and security. The toilet facilities are far from most shacks, and women must walk long distances to get there. Stella remembers the case of a woman who went to the toilet at night-time. “*It was around 8 pm., and it was dark. The toilets didn’t have any lights, so she used her phone torch. When she left the cab, a man who had been following her covered her mouth and took her phone. She was drunk, and the man dragged her away from the settlement. Some people saw this but preferred not to interfere, thinking it was just another couple fighting. The man dragged the woman to the tar road, telling her he would rape her and kill her. The woman got her back and arms very injured. She cried, but it was in vain. Nobody could hear her because of the noise of the cars. The man continued his way with her as he looked for a safer place to rape her. Fortunately, the woman fought back, kicked him hard and ran away. She took with her the hat the man was wearing. When she got back to the settlement, a friend took her to the hospital. When she was back, she asked the rest of the community if anyone knew someone who could wear that hat. Nobody gave any names, so the culprit got away”. (Narrative photovoice, November 2020).* Most of the stories of abuse in the settlement have a similar ending. The thief or rapist is hardly found. And when he is found, he is protected by others. This situation has made many women lose their hopes of alternative outcomes.

In the same vein, women in the area would not feel safe or secure because the culprits are not imprisoned.For Stella, *“there are many thieves, thugs, and rapists, and they are all free. The thugs target women who live alone and break in their shacks carrying weapons, such as sharp knives and axes. During the festive season, it’s even worse because thieves steal more, making women feel more in danger” (Interview, February 2021)*. Hlamalani added, *“Rapists and thugs enter the shacks very easily and with violence. They climb on top of the house. Then they tear the plastic that some of us use as a roof and enter the house. It is very shocking. They carry weapons and threaten the woman not to scream or make any moves” (Focus group, January 2021).*

Similarly, for Siphiwe, living in the settlement for more than five years have shown her that being a woman with no family or networks in the area represents a challenge almost impossible to overcome. “*To be safe here in the settlement, you have to have your family and not be alone. If the thugs and rapists don’t know you, then they will break into your house because they see or think you have no one with you” (Interview, November 2020).* And whilst kidnapping has rarely occurred, the number of women being abused or robbed near the road has also increased over the last few years. *“There is a woman who lives alone, near the tar road. Her house is isolated from other houses. She is exposed to thugs, thieves, and rapists who can come by the road, do whatever they want with her, and then leave. The woman living in this shack is not safe or secure at all. Firstly, her shack is built with fragile material, which you cannot trust. Cardboard, plastic, and planks are easy to pull out, so the thugs take advantage of that. Secondly, since the house is isolated, you cannot hear the woman if she shouts for help. Some cars pass by the road and make a lot of noise. Thirdly, it can also be easy for the woman to be kidnapped since the shack is on the roadside. More especially, at night-time, because the woman works as a security guard and comes back around midnight. Several times, cars stop by to act for directions, so the woman is mostly exposed to kidnappers”* *(Stella, Narrative photovoice, November 2020).* Therefore, women living alone by the main road next to the settlement are doubly exposed. If the aggressor does not live in Magangeni, he can easily escape. While if he lives in the settlement, he can enter the house and attack the woman without being heard or noticed by anyone else.However, most thieves would be men who live in the settlement. As Patricia described in the focus group, “*In our settlement, thieves are mostly people that we know, because during the day they become friends, and make you think that they are good people. However, at the same time, they are checking your shack and looking for ways to enter and steal any valuable assets you might have*”. *(Focus group, January 2021).* Hlamalani added, *“In the end, there is no one you can trust. It is very shocking to see that the same people we take as brothers, the ones that we see as fathers, are the ones that rape us and rob us” (Focus group, January 2021).*

The empirical material presented in this sub-section suggests that safety and security issues in Magangeni informal settlement (including physical violence, sexual violence, and robberies) can be affected by several factors. First, lockdown measures amidst the pandemic impacted the number of working toilets in the settlement, turning them into isolated and dark cabins to use. Second, according to the participants, women living alone in Magangeni would be more exposed to being robbed and having housebreaks than those having family networks in the settlement. Thieves would come from inside and outside the settlement, adding a lack of trust and insecurity among the female dwellers. The following sub-sections discuss the power dynamics and organising of the area committee regarding other gender issues in the settlement and the learnings and possible solutions identified by research participants.

* + 1. *Role and power dynamics of the Area Committee*

The Magangeni area committee officially had 18 members, with men and women equally represented. However, things changed in 2020. Before the national lockdown, some committee members left the settlement. During the lockdown, the committee meetings were cancelled. And after the lockdown was eased, a few members decided to quit the committee. Still, female participants who are not part of the area committee articulated that reaching gender equality in the informal settlement would require much more than equal representation in the area committee.

Women in Magangeni still feel they need to overcome several challenges because of being a woman and not coming from the same city as most of the committee does. In the focus group that Stella conducted in February 2021, women who are not part of the committee were asked how the committee deals with gender issues in the settlement. Patricia criticised that the committee is *“not good at dealing with gender issues because they will choose sides without reasoning the roots of the problem in most cases. Most committee members come from the same city, so your case might not be considered if you do not come from that area. When there is gender-based violence, they will turn a blind eye to the suspect if they come from the same place. Sometimes you would even be threatened if you are not coming from that same town”.* In the same vein, Hlamalani commented, “*There is no one you can trust in our settlement… not even the committee members. Because when you report an incident, they ask you to report it to the police station. The committee protects the culprits because they know them. Women should not waste their time reporting their cases to the committee. They should go straight to the police station”* *(Focus group, January 2021).* According to the participants, issues such as kinship-based power protection would be ‘normal’ among Magangeni dwellers. As further addressed in the analysis section, this would represent an invisible form of power. While it is not written or discussed explicitly, those coming from a specific country region would feel -and arguable be more protected than others when being affected by gender-based violence.

Female participants also feel that the area committee discriminates against women regarding job opportunities. Patricia mentioned that *“the area committee of this settlement disrespects women. When the committee receives job opportunities from the Municipality, the first* people *to be considered are men. Men are usually prioritised over women” (Focus group, January 2021).* Stella agrees. For her, *“Job opportunities here in the settlement usually favour men over women. Many women are unemployed in our settlement. When you enter this settlement, you see women sitting under the trees. They are just there, sitting jobless. Men take most jobs that are offered. It is when NGOs come to implement a project in the settlement, when women have a better chance to participate and get a job” (Interview, February 2021).* Stella thinks it is all part of a vicious cycle. According to the co-researcher, “*Women are not offered jobs. They then increase their economic dependency on their partners, and the partners beat them and threaten them both physically and economically. The woman is afraid to report the abuse. She feels the area committee will not help her and knows the police will not do much either. She keeps quiet*” *(Narrative photovoice, November 2020)*.

When it gets to striking and protesting, tensions between men and women of the settlement and the area committee had arisen. In October 2020, the committee organised a strike demanding formal access to electricity and new toilets for the settlement. Nikiwe, a female representative of the area committee, remembers, “*Men formed the strike. Around 3 am I heard some people on the road, putting stones, but I continued sleeping. By 4 am, they closed the road, and by 5 or 6 am, they were already stopping cars and telling them not to pass. The men of our settlement were very violent. They had sticks and all sorts of other things for protesting with violence. Men believed that women would be scared of striking because of the police. Some others thought that if they involved women, the strike would not be strong enough, so they did not even ask us our opinions nor invited us to protest. But we thought that if we were fighting for access to basic services in Magangeni, we should all be involved. We asked our neighbours to wake up the women of the settlement, and by 8 am, many of us were joining the strike*”. *(Interview, December 2020)*

Nikiwe continues, *“When I went to the road, I saw that the men of the area committee were leading the strike. I was speechless. They were burning a car. They told me they had told the driver to stop the vehicle and not pass. But the guy did not obey. Then they told him to get off the car and then burnt it. They also burnt a bus. It all happened while I was sleeping. I also saw the police taking photos, so I decided to go back to my house before the situation worsened. Most of the women did the same. I heard that the men of the area committee then broke into the councillor’s office and three other municipality offices destroying almost everything they found. On their way back, they broke into a liquor store stealing many bottles of alcohol. I could see how the police came with the water cannon from my house. I locked inside my house, but I could hear the police by the road. They said they had to make sure they were ‘fully loaded’ with rubber bullets before entering the settlement. Then they went door by door, through each of the sections of our settlement, knocking on the doors, breaking in the houses, and looking for men. Whenever they found a man, they would take him out of his house and arrest them. They were beating the men of the settlement and calling them thieves. Even those who were innocent were arrested. They had never joined the strike or robbed the liquor shop. It was hard. If you came out of your house, you would be hit by a bullet. The following day, the area committee called a meeting to discuss how to take them out of jail. I heard they asked for donations. I was not there. The same afternoon of the strike, I took a taxi and said ‘no, I can’t live like this’. The police didn’t care if you were innocent or not. So, I went away, maybe for a week, and only came back when I was sure that things were all right” (Interview, December 2020)*

For this protest, the men of the area committee decided not to involve women. According to the participants, some thought they protected them from participating in a violent event. Some others thought women would represent a liability for the strength of their protest. Either way, they were excluded from the decision-making. Then they were exposed to the violence of both the protestors and the police. This time, safety and security were not just an issue because of being a woman, living alone, or not having arrived from a particular city to live in the settlement. As further discussed in the analysis section, the findings of this sub-section suggest women's safety and security were also at risk because of the unilateral and arguably violent decisions of the men of the area committee that represent them. Accordingly, female participants felt the 50:50 gender ratio is insufficient to deal with gender issues in Magangeni. Furthermore, how the area committee protects the culprits if they come from the same area makes women not trust them anymore. The following sub-section reflects on the learnings and possible solutions identified by the research participants regarding physical and sexual violence and safety and security issues experienced by women living in Magangeni informal settlement.

* + 1. *Learning and organising*

For Stella, the key issues to overcome gender-based violence in the settlement are (self) respect, education, and access to information. “*After all the conversations I had with the different research participants, I learnt there is still a long way to go for men in our settlement. They need to understand and learn how to respect and treat women better. I have noticed and learnt that the background of most men in our area has left a bad influence on them because, in their homes, women are still oppressed by men, so women’s opinions don’t count. The learnings back at home have left a bad habit on them. In our area, we should seek information about our rights and laws so that people stop justifying rape. I have also noticed that alcohol and unemployment also stimulate abuse in women, and broken families sometimes cause that abuse. I also think men from our area need to be taught how to treat, respect, and, more especially, love a woman. But most importantly, I’ve learned that you should love yourself as a woman. Women must learn to be independent and not depend so much on men*” *(Interview, February 2021).*

Additionally, the community does not seem to trust the police anymore. For Stella, *“The police have not done a good job in our settlement in handling the issues involving women. I have never heard of someone getting arrested for any case involving women here. There was a case in December 2020 where a girl was raped. The police came to take the culprit, but the men in our area threw stones to beat the police because the rapist was their friend. They didn’t mind that the police had already handcuffed the rapist. The police ran for their lives while the guys took their friend and ran. He was sent by his friends to the farms to be safe. So, who would protect women when the police can’t? They are not doing well here (Personal interview, February 2021).* Mkateko added, “*We do not support each other in this area. If you die, you die. If you are abused, that’s your problem. We lack protection from our brothers. Maybe if the police and the politicians who represent us could come and talk to the community members, things could change*” *(Focus group, January 2021)*. Hlamalani continued: “*Women are scared. We need unity. Being united and treating each other as a family can be good. Women should be treasured, not oppressed*” *(Focus group, January 2021)*. Patricia suggested, “*At least one rapist needs to be arrested. That will send a message to the rest. No matter if the rapist is a friend of them, our neighbours should not be defending him, and the police should arrest them” (Focus group, January 2021). Other responses in the focus group included,* “*Nothing has worked. All initiatives have failed to deal with our issues as women”;* “*The committee or the police are the same… they do nothing*”; and “*Nothing has worked because women are broken in our community. They have anger towards men*” *(Focus group January 2021).* In that sense, for Nikiwe the solutions can only come from the victim itself*. “When a woman faces abuse from her partner, she is the only one who can save herself from that problem. You can talk to her today and agree that she will leave the house, but then the next day, you will see them together, laughing and in love, even hating you for your suggestion”* (*Interview, January 2021*)*.*

When thinking about possible solutions against gender-based violence in the settlement, research participants recall different proposals and actions, but most of them have not worked. For Patricia, “*A couple of neighbours were once appointed to guard the community, but they stopped doing it because they were not paid*” *(Focus Group, January 2021)*. She adds that for the national lockdown, “*taverns were closed, and during that time there were fewer cases of violence against women. Yet as soon as the restrictions were eased, cases started to rise again*”. *(Focus Group, January 2021).* Additionally, some NGO initiatives have offered casual jobs to women in the settlement. And while they provide a small stipend for the short-term, they offer the opportunity to challenge women’s economic dependency on their partners. For Siphiwe, *“job opportunities can help us in many ways. Having a job will make women be financially independent and not worship their partner for money” (Interview conducted by Stella, November 2020)*.

Besides, the research UTFS has been conducting in the settlement since 2014 (see Chapter V) has allowed female participants to engage actively and have their voices heard on several issues, mainly related to climate justice and disaster risk management in the area. While the participants do not always receive a stipend for their participation, their involvement in participatory action research has helped them gain new skills, knowledge, and self-confidence, as indicated by several female participants throughout the interviews. Yet Stella thinks one of the best initiatives to address gender-based violence in the informal settlement was the creation of a women’s committee. “*I believe women need to stand up for each other and act. We know that when there are cases of rape, men tend to side with each other, so we need women to support each other. The women’s committee has been tried several times, and it has not worked. People didn’t want to be part of it. Nobody wanted to solve any conflict because they knew that people would hate them and threaten them. But we need to insist on it, raise our voices and support each other. I also think more women should be added to the (existing) area committee so that there could be more people to stand for them”. (Interview, February 2021)*

This subsection introduced some of the learnings and solutions that female participants presented to deal with gender-based violence in Magangeni. It highlighted the relevance of self-respect, education, access to information and job opportunities to overcome fear and economic dependency on their partners. Besides, creating a women’s committee in the settlement still creates tensions among the participants. Women have tried to implement it before, but it has not worked. As further discussed in the analysis section, while some participants insist on the idea of creating a committee in which women can support each other, others arguably discouraged by threats would instead not join. Part one of this chapter has illustrated three categories of challenges: physical, sexual abuse, safety, and security issues. It then examined the role and participation of the area committee in tackling the gender-based challenges in the informal settlement and women’s understanding of the issues and possible solutions (see Table 6A: Summary of Findings). The second part of this chapter draws on the literature to inform a deeper analysis of the findings presented above. It starts by examining how the self-identified challenges operate at different levels, spaces, and forms of power (that are all interrelated); to then reflect on the significance of the notions of epistemic violence, coercion and consent, and difference and strategic essentialism for understanding the relationship between gender-based violence and organising in Magangeni.

* 1. **Analysis**

This thesis explores how power dynamics affect the organising of the subalterns in Magangeni, examining to what extent these can alter or perpetuate the subjugation subalterns face. Consequently, this chapter examines the challenges of gender-based violence, one of the three issues identified and suggested by the co-researchers concerning the subalterns organising in the informal settlement. The first part of this chapter illustrated three categories of challenges: physical violence, sexual violence, and safety and security issues. It then examined the role and participation of the area committee in tackling these gender-based challenges in the informal settlement and women’s understanding of the issues and possible solutions. The second part of this chapter, in turn, draws on the literature to inform a deeper analysis of the findings presented above.

The analysis section below is divided into two subsections. The first subsection examines how the self-identified challenges operate at different levels, spaces, and forms of power involving various stakeholders affecting gender-based violence and women organising in the informal settlement. This part examines how all power dimensions are dynamic and interrelated and how the various stakeholders respond to different identities and overlapping positions according to the context and the power dynamics at stake. Furthermore, this first subsection aims to contribute to new theoretical knowledge by addressing a relatively new level to Gaventa’s power cube framework, namely the household level. In so doing, it intends to highlight gender analysis at the household level and the extent to which women’s oppression can be constructed and reproduced in a particular context, an aspect that, according to literature, has not been easily applied through the power cube framework (Pantazidou, 2012; Gaventa, 2021). The second subsection intends to contribute to new empirical knowledge on the relationship between gender-based violence, power dynamics and organisational practices of the subalterns in Magangeni informal settlement. Drawing on postcolonial, decolonial, and subaltern studies, highlights the importance of difference and strategic essentialism for understanding female dwellers organising in the settlement.

***6.2.1 Gender-Based Violence (GBV) in Gaventa’s power cube framework***

While using the power cube framework can highlight issues of violence against women often hidden from public spaces (Pearce and Vela, 2005), Gaventa (2006) found that the framework was not being easily applied to gender analysis, as the power cube did not explicitly introduce private spaces of power which are critical realms in gender studies. In that sense, Pantazidou (2012) identified that some of the challenges of the power cube framework were to translate diagnosis about power relations into effective responses and examine further inequalities such as gender disparities, understanding that power affecting men and women could eventually differ. In his later work in 2019, Gaventa explained that aspects of the power cube framework resonated and had drawn from feminist thinking on gender and power, especially the idea of invisible power, which focused on norms and internalised forms of oppression. As a result, the scholar extended the level dimensions to the ‘household level’ to make the link between power in domestic, private, and public spaces more explicit. The scholar added the household level to the global, national, and local levels, looking at power relations within and across levels along a continuum. Gaventa considered that breaking down the levels of power in categories of contextual relevance -such as households- could be relevant for grasping the relationality of power (as a woman might be powerful in one level and powerless in another). For the scholar (ibid.), while the household level may be outside the public sphere, it can still help shape what occurs within it. As this research had adapted the power levels to national, municipal, and neighbourhood levels, the household is included as the fourth level of analysis for this chapter (see Figure 6B). Focusing on power dynamics at the household level and their interactions with those at the neighbourhood level makes it possible to enlighten how women's oppression is constructed and reproduced in Magangeni. As described in the findings, women in Magangeni informal settlement suffer intimate partner violence, experience economic dependency, and are threatened and silenced by partners and relatives. Moreover, these issues are closely related to others experienced at the local/neighbourhood level, such as safety and security and the role of the police and NGOs. Consequently, this section discusses the relationship between power dynamics and gender-based violence in Magangeni organising, interrelating the levels, spaces, and forms of power with the self-identified challenges presented by the participants in the previous section.

The findings suggest that the main feeling among women in Magangeni is a lack of trust at all power levels. There is no faith in the Municipality, the police, the area committee, or the informal settlement neighbours to make things differently. However, some female participants believe the situation can change for women living in Magangeni. For them, there is a role that every actor involved in the settlement needs to play differently to alter power dynamics. In that sense, the participants identified actions that the police, the area committee, NGOs and local universities, and the settlement women could adopt for transformative change across levels, spaces, and forms of power. The following subsections analyse the levels of power, then the spaces of power, and finally the forms of power regarding gender-based violence and organising in Magangeni informal settlement, to conclude by discussing how and to what extent they are all interrelated.

*Figure 6B: Power cube framework (re-adapted from Gaventa, 2019)*****

*6.2.1.1 GBV and Levels of power*

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Levels of power** | **Self-identified challenge** | **Actors involved** |
| Neighbourhood/ household | Physical violence/ Sexual violence/ Safety and security | Police/ Area committee/ Magangeni dwellers |

As further discussed in the following sub-sections, power analysis is helpful for understanding who exercises what kind of power and drawing attention to the nature of relationships that create or sustain specific power dynamics. In that sense, for Pantazidou (2012), the power cube framework raises questions about how various actors condition spaces of power at different levels by less visible forms of power that delineate who can do what or have a voice within those spaces. According to the participants, the police and the area committee do not help with safety and security issues. For the women dwellers, the police should lead by example, arresting rapists and thieves, no matter the aggressive reactions of the culprits, their families, and friends. It is believed that after one arrest takes place, men will feel threatened and think twice before committing a crime.

Consequently, the women of the settlement think the police should be a key ally for protecting them and providing them with a safe space to report any episode of abuse. If security cannot be guaranteed within the settlement, the least they would expect is the police to help them and protect them from further abuse. Yet, this is the same police they would confront when protesting and demanding access to essential services to the Municipality. For the subaltern women in the settlement, if the police aim to provide safety and security to the citizens by forbidding protests in the public space, they should also aim to protect women by prohibiting and punishing intimate partner violence in the private space. In other words, the participants suggest that the power that the police exert over Magangeni dwellers in different protests should also be applied to partner violence at the household level.

Similarly, according to the participants, the area committee should not defend indefensible criminals. If the committee is to represent, protect, and offer justice in the informal settlement, they should not struggle to clear the names of the culprits just because most of them come from the same region. In this context, the area committee puts their credibility, responsibility, and fairness at stake and perpetuates injustice and exclusion within the informal settlement. This behaviour would represent a contradiction of the area committee, considering that they claim higher levels of justice and inclusion at all other power levels, namely the ward, the Municipality, and the national government. When the area committee feels that the informal settlement is being ignored by the ward councillor or not considered in the decision-making by the Municipality, they fight to be seen, heard, and treated fairly. Within the settlement, women do not seem to be demanding anything different.

According to the research participants, the area committee would defend people from the same region due to shared kinship. In his work “Kinship and the Social Order” (1969), Fortes explains that kinship and social organisation belong simultaneously to two complementary domains of social structure, the familial and the political. His contribution has been understood in the context of a balance of forces between the household and the public domains. For the scholar, where there is society, there is both kinship and polity. What is distinctive would be their relative elaboration and differentiation, their relative weight and scope in different sectors of social life, depending on the culture and the context. In that sense, Magangeni informal settlement is part of a province, where Reynolds (2016) suggests that Zulu identity politics and traditions retain a deep hold and that obligations and responsibilities linked to kinship claims would continue to structure forces in the lives of many.

Yet, the scholar also examines how, over the last 50 years, many scholars have described the destruction of the Zulu family at the hands of colonialism, apartheid, and capitalism. This would have occurred after two breaking points. The first split was between generations, as young-wage-earning men moved away from their households. The second split would have become more apparent after apartheid between men and women, dividing men from the means of creating and maintaining a household. Accordingly, Seekings (2008) suggests in South Africa, individuals move between urban and rural households (hence they are ‘fluid’) and can belong to more than one household at the same time (hence they are ‘porous’). In his work, the scholar discusses how fluid and porous households can be and how extended are families in terms of the obligations and claims that kin can make to each other. Seekings affirms that “studies of South African households have demonstrated that they rarely conform to the stable model of the western-nuclear-family-household, frequently including a variety of kin and even non-kin, in a variety of ways” (p.28).

Furthermore, if during the 1960s kinship across societies in South Africa was arguably binding (creating inescapable moral claims and obligations), the scholar suggests kinship would nowadays entail choice and agency, whereby individuals can contest and negotiate the claims made on them, and the claims they make on others (Seekings, 2008). While acknowledging these different critiques, the aim of my research has not been to delve deeply into critical analyses of kinship in anthropology. For my purposes here, the aim is to present kinship as a contested and dynamic concept that would arguably still have a relevant significance in Magangeni, as highlighted by the research participants. The following sub-section examines the relationship between spaces of power and gender-based violence in Magangeni organising. In so doing, it aims to reflect on the second dimension of Gaventa’s power cube framework and its impact on the informal settlement dynamics.

*6.2.1.2 GBV and Spaces of power*

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Spaces of power**  | **Self-identified challenge** | **Actors involved** |
| Closed | Safety and security/ Role and power dynamics of the area committee | Male representatives of the area committee/ Female representatives of the area committee/ Other female dwellers |
| Invited | Economic dependency | NGOs/ UTFS/ Female dwellers |
| Claimed/ Created | Participation and representativeness  | Female dwellers |

For Gaventa (2021), spaces of power can be used for multiple purposes, and action in one can leverage power in another. Moreover, every space of power would itself be filled and affected by the forms of power within it (Cornwall, 2002). In October 2020, male representatives of the informal settlement area committee planned a protest to demand formal access to electricity and new toilets. Protesting was decided behind doors and with no intention of including women. Even though the strike was organised to demand formal access to electricity and new toilets for the whole settlement, men considered that women would be “scared of striking because of the police”, or that the strike was “not going to be strong enough” if women were part of it. While not part of the decision-making, women of the committee decided to participate in the protest against the Municipality demanding access to essential services in the settlement. In so doing, they invited other women of the settlement to join the protest. After women showed up in the strike, men agreed to fight together. Once part of the protest, women reprimanded the men of the committee because of the violence it was taking. But, according to the female participants, men chose not to listen. As the protest turned violent, most of the women went back home. Still, as men continued protesting, the police entered the informal settlement in very violent terms too. After breaking into different municipality offices and stealing from a liquor store, most protesting men were arrested. None of the women did. According to female research participants, the unilateral and violent decisions taken by male representatives of the area committee put most women in the settlement at risk.

In Gaventa’s power cube framework, the decisions made by a set of actors behind doors and without any pretence of broadening the boundaries for inclusion is referred to as closed spaces of power (2006). This highly relates to hidden forms of power that refer to the group of people setting the agenda and controlling who is at the table for the decision-making favouring certain interests over others (ibid.). Male representatives of the area committee felt the Municipality was not hearing the informal settlement dwellers. They wanted formal access to basic services, so they decided to strike. Yet, while claiming spaces of participation at the municipal level, they also closed spaces of participation for women at the informal settlement level. Male representatives of the area committee used hidden forms of power through closed spaces to exclude women representatives from the decision-making table. Women, in turn, claimed for spaces of participation to be part of the protests and invited other female dwellers to join the rest of the men dwellers in protesting against the Municipality.

According to Gaventa (2021), different actors can use spaces of power for several purposes and can co-opt the spaces created by the powerful for their own ends. For the scholar, while invited spaces of power created by the powerful could be seen as a way of retaining power over the subalterns, marginalised groups have demonstrated the capacity to use their agency to subvert this original purpose. According to the participants in Magangeni, women have been beneficiated from the spaces of power to which other stakeholders have invited them to participate. In that sense, several NGOs have encouraged the participation of women in the settlement, offering them a salary to participate in different projects. And while these are usually short-term projects providing a small stipend, they offer the opportunity to challenge women’s economic dependency on their partners, as previously described in the findings section. Furthermore, the research that UTFS has been conducting in the settlement since 2014 has allowed female participants to engage actively and have their voices heard on several issues, mainly related to climate justice and disaster risk management in the area. While the participants do not always receive a stipend for their participation, their involvement in participatory action research has arguably helped them gain new skills, knowledge, and self-confidence, as indicated by several female participants throughout the interviews.

Gaventa’s power cube framework (2006) defines the last space of power as claimed (or created) spaces of participation. According to the scholar, these are spaces claimed by the marginalised against those holding power or created more autonomously. As examined in the previous chapter, these spaces can emerge from popular mobilisation, identity-based concerns or simply spaces in which a community join in common pursuit (Cornwall, 2002). For Pantazidou (2012), these spaces can allow marginalised groups to shape the rules and norms of engagement and deliberate and articulate their agendas before entering invited spaces of power or advocating on the edges of closed spaces. Moreover, according to the scholar, claimed space of power could both nurture empowerment and give birth to new strategies for addressing hidden and visible forms of power (as discussed further in the following subsection).

As described in the previous section, Stella (one of the co-researchers) suggests Magangeni women need to stand up for each other and act. She is one of the research participants who has insisted on having a women’s committee in the informal settlement. Even though the idea has not worked in previous times, she believes that women in the informal settlement should have a women’s committee as a platform to raise their voices and support each other (see section 6.2.2.2). According to several scholars (Bradley, 2020; Gaventa, 2021), the notion of ‘power within’ women emphasises a process of conscientisation through which they could develop a more critical understanding of the power that shapes power over their lives. Including more female representatives in the Magangeni committee is another possible solution that emerged from the findings and went in a similar direction. By claiming their spaces of power against a male-dominant discourse –whether through a women’s committee or more representation in the existent area committee- women could eventually have a scope to challenge and reshape fixed and invisible forms of power within Magangeni, as further described in the following sub-section. However, Gaventa (2021) affirms that simply creating new spaces of power for previously excluded groups to participate is not enough. According to the scholar, these spaces would need the support and political will of stakeholders inside the state (sometimes from within their closed spaces of power), and by effective mobilisation from the outside by stakeholders who can insist on accountability and advocate for the marginalised groups inside invited spaces of power. Critical, therefore, would be the process of how to build alliances and coalitions which can work across these spaces, as previously addressed in this chapter.

The following sub-section examines the relationship between forms of power and gender-based violence in Magangeni organising. In so doing, it aims to reflect on the last of three dimensions of Gaventa’s power cube framework and its impact on the informal settlement dynamics.

*6.2.1.3 GBV and**Forms of power*

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Forms of power**  | **Self-identified challenge** | **Actors involved** |
| Hidden | Role and power dynamics of the area committee | Male and female representatives of the area committee |
| Invisible | Safety and security/ Physical violence/ Sexual violence/ Economic dependency | Male and female representatives of the area committee / Neighbours/ Female dwellers |

As examined in the previous chapters, hidden forms of power would relate to the power exerted by groups or institutions who, out of view, set the political agendas, and control who is part of the decision-making and what is included on the agenda. Invisible forms of power, in turn, would shape meanings and define what should be considered ‘normal’ or acceptable, or safe in a specific context (Gaventa, 2006). In that sense, looking at what happens inside spaces of power would be crucial in understanding how hidden and invisible forms of power operate. For Pantazidou (2012), who participates in invited spaces, who is the gatekeeper, and what knowledge, values, and forms of expression are legitimised inside those spaces are all questions that need to be asked for a better understanding of how power operates in its different forms. Accordingly, to obtain changes in the visible form of power (namely formal rules, structures, and decision-making procedures), it would be crucial also to address invisible forms of power that could shift internalised norms and assumptions about what is possible (ibid.)

In that sense, a plausible reason female dwellers would seldom report a case of physical or sexual abuse is their economic dependency on their male partners. While most of the dwellers of Magangeni struggle to get a job, for women is even more difficult. The settlement still follows a gender role distribution in which men are expected to be the main provider, and women are responsible for domestic tasks and housekeeping. Besides, if it was hard for the informal settlement dwellers to get a job in ‘normal’ times, during the Covid-19 outbreak, it was even more challenging (see next chapter). Most ‘informal’ dwellers lost their ‘informal’ jobs because of the national lockdown. Once the restrictions were partially eased, the Municipality offered Magangeni dwellers to apply to piece jobs. However, as most of the jobs were in the construction sector, the area committee decided only to offer these opportunities to men. In this context, the women in the settlement were economically dependent on the government’s help and their partners’ income. As the government’s support took time and was not constant, the economic dependence on their couples increased. This situation arguably made women silence intimate partner violence, desist from reporting, and keep the *status quo*. In that sense, Pantazidou (2012) signals it is not enough to empower individuals. Still, processes should support collective conscientisation to influence other stakeholders that oppress the disempowered through hidden and visible forms of power. For the scholar (ibid., p.17), “when talking about invisible power, attention needs to be given both to de-constructing internalised oppression at the individual level and to delegitimising the norms and beliefs that give birth to the oppression”. This would apply to all committee representatives, male and female dwellers in Magangeni.

Yet, as addressed throughout this research, the subalterns are not homogeneous, and their relationships are dynamic. In that sense, the research participants described the story of a woman who identified who her rapist was and made the rest of her neighbours help her and react. By then, women -accompanied by men- decided to take justice into their own hands. Through spontaneous self-organising, women beat the culprit to death. The episode tells us how women organising can adopt different identities, depending on the specific situation. The women who had previously suffered physical and sexual abuse from this same person without reporting to the police were now taking justice into their own hands. Likewise, the fact that the culprit had not got family/place links and networks arguably made the area committee and other neighbours do not stop the attacks.

*6.2.1.4 Conclusion: Gender-based power dynamics in Magangeni*

This section has analysed the levels, spaces, and forms of power regarding gender-based violence and organising in Magangeni informal settlement. As discussed throughout the findings of this chapter, all power dimensions are dynamic and interrelated. For Gaventa (2006), the biggest challenge is how to align all the different dimensions simultaneously to create change. According to the scholar (ibid., p.30),“Just like the Rubik’s cube, successful change is about getting each of the pieces on each dimension of the cube to align with each other simultaneously. There is no single strategy or entry point for any given issue or action. Much depends on navigating the intersection of the relationships, which in turn can either contribute to new misalignments and distortions of power or simultaneously create new boundaries of possibility for strategic action”. Table 6C summarises the discussions of this section. The first column shows the different self-identified challenges the research participants related to gender-based violence and self-organising in Magangeni. The other columns identify the different power dynamics and actors involved in each of those challenges. As illustrated in the table, the self-identified challenges operate at different levels, spaces, and forms of power involving various stakeholders affecting gender-based violence and organising in the informal settlement. As further explained in the following section, these actors would respond to different identities and overlapping positions according to the context and the power dynamics at stake.

*Table 6C: Gender-based power dynamics in Magangeni*

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Self-identified challenge** | **Levels of power** | **Spaces of power** | **Forms of power** | **Actors involved** |
| Safety and security/ Physical violence/ Sexual violence | Neighbourhood/ Household | Closed | Invisible | Police/ Area committee representatives/ Magangeni dwellers |
| Role and power dynamics of the area committee | Neighbourhood/ Household | Closed | Hidden | Area committee representatives/ Magangeni dwellers |
| Participation and representativeness | Neighbourhood | Closed/ Claimed | Hidden/ Visible | Female dwellers |
| Economic dependency | Household | Closed | Invisible | Magangeni dwellers |

The following section focuses on subaltern women and the relationship between subalternity and organising in Magangeni informal settlement. This relationship is examined through the notions of heterogeneity and strategic essentialism.

***6.2.2 Subaltern women organising in Magangeni***

This section examines the relationship between subalternity and women organising in Magangeni informal settlement. It aims to continue exploring the complexities of the subalterns organising in the informal settlement, addressing the particularities of their multiple and heterogeneous identities. In particular, it intends to explore and reflect on the organising of women regarding gender-based violence as part of a broader debate on inclusion, social justice, and participation. In that sense, it does not intend to address current discussions on gender studies literature, as those debates fall beyond the scope of this research. By offering insights into postcolonial, decolonial, and subaltern studies, it highlights subaltern women as a complex and heterogeneous group that have been doubly subjugated by patriarchy and colonialism and triply marginalised in the Global South for being black, poor, and women. Additionally, it reflects on strategic essentialism and the possibilities and challenges of a women’s committee in Magangeni informal settlement.

*6.2.2.1 Women’s heterogeneity in Magangeni informal settlement*

For Lugones (2008), colonisation created the concepts of race and gender. The imposition of race accompanied the interiorisation of those in the Global South, and the imposition of gender accompanied the interiorisation of Global South women. In that sense, it would be the ‘Western gendered system’, maintained by the coloniality of gender, the one permeating patriarchal and Western control over Global South’s women’s identities and their production of knowledge. Manning (2021) critiques the ways women of the Global South have been represented in mainstream literature as a homogeneous group characterised by their feminine gender and their being ‘Third World’. According to Manning, in such representations, Global South women are presented as oppressed figures in need of Western emancipation and economic development (as previously discussed in Spivak’s example on white men and Indian women). Under those representations, women would be assumed as a coherent and homogeneous group.

In this context, Manning situates the relevance of decolonial feminist theory, particularly for the field of management and organisation studies (MOS). For Manning (ibid.), decolonial feminist theory is grounded in Global South women's lived experiences and “challenges the male/masculine, white/Western and bourgeois/managerial epistemologies that have come to dominate our discipline *[MOS]*, thereby encouraging the acceptance of another way of working and organising” (p.1204). When applying a decolonial feminist approach to MOS, Manning believes scholars, activists, and managers would be able to rethink the work and agency of Global South women. As described in previous chapters, studies of subaltern groups in MOS are considered rare, and therefore, their voices have been rarely included (Sinha, 2018). In that sense, for Manning (2021), decolonial feminist theory can help promote an epistemic move toward embracing a pluriversality of knowledges and experiences in MOS. In the scholar’s words, decolonial feminist theory would encourage women to speak of their identities, organisation and organising experiences to challenge the hegemonic practices that have eclipsed their voices with discourses about them.

In Magangeni, the agency of subaltern women is arguably limited to their role in joining the rest of the informal settlement in collective claims for access to basic needs. As discussed in the following subsection, their particular challenges have been silenced by threats and lack of interest of other actors subjugating any attempt at women’s self-organising. In that sense, subaltern women in Magangeni would arguably lack space to speak of their identities and fear self-organising to challenge those hegemonic practices subjugating them.

For Manning (ibid., p. 1205) decolonial feminist theory would allow us to “align ourselves with the social and economic struggles of Global South women… [*and*] to create a plurality of knowledge whereby all cultures, all nations remain equal, and as such all people and all communities have the right to be different precisely because everyone is considered equal”. In the same vein, Bonnerjee (2020, p.5) understands that the challenges of subaltern women in different contexts are “multifarious, rooted in a particular historical moment, affected by uneven political, racial, and national contexts, just as their modes of subversion are miscellaneous, and shaped by the exigencies of national politics”. Consequently, for the scholar it is crucial to ensure that the categories of “subaltern women” and “third world women” do not become interchangeable in the quest to examine women’s subversive struggles. This, in turn, would help researchers to recognise the heterogeneity of women’s lives.

In that sense, research participants in Magangeni experienced and identified the importance of difference in the informal settlement for women coming from different cities to live in the settlement, those with no family networks, and those living alone. In other words, of those women already subjugated because of being black and being poor, there would be three other differences that exclude them and expose them to an even more vulnerable position, namely the place where they came to live in the settlement, their kinship relationships, and whether they live with a partner. Accordingly, women living alone, with no family networks, and coming from a different city than most area committee members would need to be identified and recognised in their differences, facing other and further challenges (as those exposed throughout this chapter). Besides, as emerged from the findings, Magangeni dwellers can adopt multiple identities depending on the specific situations they face. A man who rapes a woman in the settlement can attack another rapist to protect the victim. A woman can advise another woman to report intimate partner violence but silence her suffering. The area committee would be equally represented by men and women but will not always invite female representatives to decision-making. Women will agree on the importance of having a women’s committee in the settlement and desist from participating. The latter behaviour is examined in the following subsection.

*6.2.2.2 Women’s committee: towards strategic essentialism*

As examined in section 2.1.3, Spivak (1988) suggests women would have been marginalised through intersecting subjugations in a patriarchal, sexist, and colonialist world order. In that sense, women from developing countries would face marginalisation because of being female, poor, and black. And while race was not a challenge identified by women taking part in this research, the testimonies of research participants suggest poverty and gender do represent a double challenge for women in Magangeni. In this context, the homogenisation of the subalterns could work as a strategy to achieve specific outcomes. Spivak (1988) promotes “strategic essentialism” to describe the instances when it would be helpful for subalterns to act as a group to have greater political leverage (Riach, 2017). The findings of this chapter highlighted subaltern women's voices for the need to support each other, claim to be heard, and unite against oppression.

Consequently, forming a women’s area committee is an example of a political outcome that could help achieve greater self-representation in Magangeni. According to some female research participants, just as men in Magangeni would tend to side with each other (especially if they have a kinship relation), women should do the same to protect each other and act. In so doing, women could arguably challenge invisible forms of power of what the dominant male considers normal or beneficial. This would eventually encourage a process through which female dwellers could develop a critical consciousness of the power being shaped over their lives and eventually take action to overrule it and shift from a position of subordination to one of hegemony (Gramsci, 1971).

Yet, arguably due to the fear of being threatened or physically abused, female dwellers have opted not to create or participate in a women’s committee. According to the research participants, women who have intended to self-organise and take action against gender-based violence in Magangeni have faced several obstacles. When recruiting representatives for the committee, some female dwellers felt there was no point in joining a woman´s committee due to the lack of protection from the police when reporting a case. Others mentioned being threatened by their partners not to join. Those few who eventually decided to be part of the committee said that female neighbours were afraid of sharing their stories because of what their partners could do to them. Consequently, female dwellers aiming to create this women’s committee asked for support from the informal settlement area committee. However, the informal settlement representatives showed a lack of interest in the initiative, responding that any gender-based violence case could be reported and dealt with within the existing area committee.

Eventually, the implementation of a women’s area committee was discarded. In that sense, female dwellers in Mgangeni would encounter a vicious cycle. They suffer physical and sexual abuse, but they do not report it due to mistrust in the police and the area committee. The idea of forming a women’s committee, in turn, would eventually expose them to (the threat of) further physical violence. Furthermore, claiming these new spaces of power would eventually cause them further exclusion and marginalisation from the area committee and other male dwellers. Alternatively, as examined in section 6.2.1, these claimed spaces of power would need the political will and mobilisation of different stakeholders to advocate for the female subalterns and protect them from other threats. As mentioned by the research participants, if the police acted and arrested the culprits after being reported, women would feel they could trust the police and, eventually, feel protected. Likewise, if the existent area committee showed more interest in protecting the victims and supporting the implementation of a women´s committee, the initiative would count on the validation of an already legitimised organisation within Magangeni. As examined in the previous chapter, most Magangeni dwellers regularly comply with the rules and procedures set by the area committee. Finally, the women’s committee could arguably gain protection if other relevant actors involved in Magangeni informal settlement, namely the municipality, NGOs, and other civil society organisations, could help the victims, advise them, and guide them through possible networks in the area, as part of a multidisciplinary approach to organising against gender-based violence.

*6.2.2.3 Conclusion*

This section has analysed the challenges of subaltern women self-organising in Magangeni informal settlement. Drawing on postcolonial, decolonial, and subaltern studies, it has reflected on the relevance of addressing both heterogeneity and strategic essentialism among the subaltern women in Magangeni informal settlement. The section examined how research participants in Magangeni experienced and identified the importance of difference in the informal settlement for women coming from different cities to live in the settlement, those with no family networks, and those living alone. Likewise, it reflected on strategic essentialism to leverage political outcomes exemplified in the idea of forming a women’s committee in the settlement. The notions of difference and strategic essentialism in Spivak’s work help to understand better the various dimensions affecting women self-organising in Magangeni informal settlement. The particularities of the context of Magangeni invite us to rethink the challenges the subalterns face and, most importantly, have their contributions recognised through their different perspectives and knowledge.

The following chapter addresses power dynamics and the subalterns organising in the Covid-19 outbreak in Magangeni informal settlement. It examines how, in the context of lockdown restrictions, the informal settlement dwellers had to deal with another burden that marginalised them even more: living in informality. The loss of jobs for many and the impossibility of others to even access the government’s help during 2020 are addressed together with other social and economic consequences of the pandemic that brought more hardship to the subalterns of Magangeni.

**Chapter VII: Power dynamics and subalterns organising amidst the pandemic**

This research aims to identify and discuss the forms, levels, and spaces of power within Magangeni informal settlement, examining to what extent they alter or perpetuate the factors of poverty and inequality the subaltern face. It explores the complexities of the dwellers organising in the informal settlement and their perspectives in topics they identified as relevant about their local environment and understanding of informality and community organising.

This chapter explores examples of the ways in which the Magangeni informal settlement had organised during the Covid-19 pandemic. In so doing, this chapter follows a similar structure to that taken in Chapter VI. The chapter is divided into two key sections. The first section aims to provide a space for the voices of people more usually marginalised by mainstream management and organisational studies. The findings focus on three challenges that residents of the settlement who participated in this research identified as critical issues: lockdown measures, help and organising in times of Covid-19, and living unemployed and organising in an overpopulated area (see Table 7A). For each of the examples, quotes from the interviews with people who participated in the research are presented to illuminate and insert their voices into these accounts. In the second section, which is divided into two parts the power dynamics and forms of subaltern organising amidst the pandemic in Magangeni informal settlement are analysed. The first part focuses on the challenges identified by the research participants and analyses the power dynamics and organising which took place during the national Covid-19 outbreak. In so doing, it considers visible forms of power and how these were experienced in closed spaces of participation across national, local, and neighbourhood levels of power. Included in this part of the section is a discussion of how help and organising during the pandemic were impacted by forms of visible power across different levels, involving the government, NGOs and the informal settlement dwellers. The second part focuses on subalternity and urban informality to inform a critical analysis of the processes underpinning economic, social, and political inequality that might emerge and perpetuate within the Magangeni informal settlement. In so doing, it reflects on how and to what extent the challenges identified by participants reinforce the need to address the organising of the subalterns as part of a broader debate on inclusion, social justice, and participation.

**7.1 Self-identified challenges**

*Table 7A: Summary of Findings: self-identified challenges amidst the lockdown*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Self-identified challenges** | **Main issues involved** |
| *7.1.1 Lockdown measures: The war against an invisible enemy* | - Government decisions without consulting the subalterns and sending confusing messages, especially regarding informal settlements ‘de-densification’. - Dwellers’ exclusion, confusion, uncertainty, and not being allowed to speak for themselves (NGOs eventually invited by the government to speak on behalf of informal settlements).- Magangeni committee suspended its meetings immediately after the lockdown announcement. - Mass gatherings were forbidden. Several dwellers left the settlement to reunite with their families, and those who remained in the settlement were asked to stay home and keep safe. |
| *7.1.2 Help and organising in times of Covid-19* | - During the lockdown, different stakeholders offered their help to cover some of the basic needs in the settlement. This help was coordinated and distributed by both the donors and the informal settlement committee representatives. - Help provided Magangeni with minimum standards and basic needs to ameliorate the infection risks and overcome hunger as short-term relief. The social, and economic inequalities experienced by the subaltern, such as overcrowding and unemployment, were not prioritised during the emergency. |
| *7.1.3 Living unemployed and organising in an overpopulated area* | - During the research fieldwork, there was not a single case diagnosed with Covid-19 in the settlement; the social and economic consequences of the pandemic brought more hardship into Magangeni. - Cycle of income insecurity, greater impoverishment and vulnerability. Hunger, income insecurity, job losses, and overcrowding as the main self-identified challenges.- Arguably, alcohol consumption, intimate partner violence, and crime also increased.  |

*7.1.1 Lockdown measures: The war against an invisible enemy*

On March 23 2020, the President of South Africa addressed the country, declaring a 21-day nationwide lockdown due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Wearing a military dress as the acting commander-in-chief, the President mentioned the country was at war against an invisible enemy, namely the virus. It was “the first time since South Africa became a democracy in 1994 that a president had stripped away the most basic freedoms of citizens - to walk, to shop, to socialise and to congregate for prayer without hindrance… The government even banned the sale of alcohol and cigarettes, as well as jogging or walking dogs, during the lockdown - warning that offenders risked being prosecuted, and either fined or jailed” (BBC News, March 27 2020). All South Africans –with the exemption of essential workers from the health sector, those involved in the production and supply of food and essential goods and those in security services-had to stay home for three weeks[[9]](#footnote-9). Nobody could leave their homes unless under strictly controlled circumstances, such as seeking medical care, buying food, medicine and other supplies, or collecting a social grant. The South African National Defence Force (SNDF) and the police oversaw ensuring that the lockdown measures were being followed (South African Government News Agency, 2020)

In mid-April, the nationwide lockdown was extended for two more weeks. The number of confirmed coronavirus cases was rapidly increasing; hence the police were ordered to enforce intensified measures in areas with the highest number of infections, one of them being Langutani. As Martin (one of the co-researchers) recalled, *“They implemented roadblocks, maximum penalties for transgressors, and if anyone tested positive, he or she was moved to government facilities for isolation and treatment” (Narrative photovoice, December 2020*). Amongst other government announcements, *“They also promised that water tanks and sanitisers were going to be provided to informal settlements and townships. They didn’t say when, but they insisted they were going to take care of the most vulnerable*”, commented Martin (*Personal conversation, April 2020*). His testimony refers to a media briefing on Tuesday, March 30 2020. On that occasion, the Minister of Human Settlement, Water and Sanitation, Lindiwe Sisulu, stated that her ministry would provide communal water storage tanks and install liquid soap dispensers and hand sanitisers at all communal ablution facilities. However, help took longer than expected. “*By mid-April, when the national lockdown was extended, we had still not received any help from the municipality” (Joshua, Focus Group, February 2021*)*.* This, in turn, created mistrust among the dwellers. *“How can we trust the authorities if they are never on time to help? They will always have a good excuse to explain why they take so long... But in the meantime, it is us who are suffering” (Peter, Focus Group, February 2021*).It was only by the beginning of May, a month and a half after the lockdown announcement that the municipality provided water and sanitisers to the dwellers of Magangeni.

In her media briefing on March 30, the Minister of Human Settlement, Water and Sanitation also announced: “a process of de-densification to counter the effects of the lockdown on South Africa’s roughly 1.4 million informal households” (Daily Maverick, March 27, 2020). This initiative brought conflict among informal settlements in the country because the government had previously announced that all eviction orders would be automatically suspended until the country moved to a lower ‘alert level’ (South African Government, 2020)[[10]](#footnote-10). *“Although the Government had promised they would not enforce evictions during the lockdown, in other informal settlements, people were being evicted with no official order from any judge*”, declared Jonathan, one of Magangeni area committee representatives (*Interview, October 2020*). According to local reports, major cities - such as Langutani- continued to use law enforcement agencies and private security companies to remove people from informal housing during the eviction ban (City Monitor, August 7 2020). By August 2020, almost a thousand people had been evicted from informal settlements in Langutani (ibid.). For Martin, if the government wanted to evict people from informal settlements, they should have made sure to offer the shack dwellers an alternative place to stay*. “But they didn’t. Those agencies just destroyed the shacks where the people lived. That is why the shack dwellers went out to the streets to protest. I think that if it had happened to us, we would have done the same… no matter the lockdown restrictions*” (*Personal conversation, February 2021*).

And while Magangeni dwellers were not evicted, they did face other challenges due to lack of information and disinformation during the first few months of lockdown. For Joshua, “*Nobody had a clear picture of what was going on. In the beginning, some people thought it was a virus carried by white people who had travelled abroad… It was only after the first cases started to emerge in other informal settlements that we got to know that it could also affect us” (Focus Group, February 2021).* According to the research participants, eventually, they heard from the government that they had to wear facemasks and wash their hands to prevent the virus. Still, for Peter, *“everybody came with their own theories to minimise the spread of the virus. Some would mention that we were safe because of the hot weather we had… Others said we had to consume garlic and drink warm water to be better protected”* *(Focus Group, February 2021*). For Martin, amidst the confusion, the dwellers’ main aim was to protect their families from the virus. “*Whether the problem was the lack of information or the disinformation, the truth is that during the first few months since the lockdown announcement, we were all doing what we thought could protect our beloved ones and us the best we could”* (*Personal conversation, February 2021*).

This subsection described how Magangeni informal settlement dwellers had to wait for almost two months to receive help from the government amidst the pandemic. Those first months since the beginning of the lockdown were characterised by a general sense of disinformation and lack of information. This disinformation and lack of information, in turn, created more confusion regarding how to protect from the virus. In the meantime, dwellers from other informal settlements along the country were evicted. The following subsection examines the ways Magangeni organised during the Covid-19 pandemic and to what extent and how the help received from the municipality and other stakeholders allowed them to overcome the challenges faced during 2020.

* + 1. *Help and organising in times of Covid-19*

It took time before Magangeni settlers opted to comply with the lockdown rules. According to Peter, *“When we first heard the government asking the country to stay home, wash our hands, and wear facemasks, we did not take it that seriously” (Focus Group, February 2021).* For Joshua, *“It was only after I heard people getting infected in other informal settlements that I thought, ‘Hey, this can also happen to us’” (Focus Group, February 2021)*. Accordingly, staying home and maintaining social distance was arguably the hardest to follow from all the lockdown restrictions. For Martin, *“The issue of staying indoors didn’t work as planned in our settlement. The reason for that is that the area is overcrowded. It is tough to control the movement of a huge number of people in a very small place like our settlement” (Narrative photo-voice, February 2021).* In the same vein, Sanele, another dweller, added that *“People in our settlement never bothered to respect the rule of staying 1.5 meters apart. It was impossible to do so. And to be honest, we didn’t want to. We never stopped sharing alcohol or cigarettes with friends in closed spaces* [Although the government had banned the sale of alcohol and cigarettes, the settlers had access to those goods through the black market and the production of artisanal beer]*” (Focus Group, February 2021).*

Still, members of the area committee affirmed they took action to comply with social distancing. *“As an area committee, we had to set an example to prevent any infection, so we stopped calling our meetings”,* said Thomas *(Interview, October 2020).* In that sense, another committee representative, Carlton, explained that *“We were not going to expose our 15-20 representatives to meet indoors with no proper ventilation. The government did not allow meeting in such conditions with a large group, and we didn’t want to go against the rules” (Interview, October 2020).* For the area committee members, suspending the meetings was an act of compliance with the government rules. However, Martin (who is not part of the area committee) considers it was just a practical decision considering most committee members would not be around for a while. He remembered, *“The nationwide lockdown was announced on March 23 but only effective from March 27. Many area committee members travelled to their hometowns during those four days, mostly in rural areas, to stay with their families. So, I think that was the main reason why to suspend their meetings” (Interview, October 2020).* Whether it was an issue of complying with the rules or just a practical decision, the fact is that the area committee stopped their weekly meetings for almost two months.

However, not having regular meetings did not impede the Magangeni committee to organise the help the informal settlement received. Peter remembered that *“The first ones to come and help us after the lockdown announcement were the NGOs. Different NGOs brought us food parcels, pamphlets, and posters for the community to read about the ‘dos and don’ts of Covid-19’. That was very helpful” (Focus Group, February 2021)*. Thomas explained how the area committee organised that help. “*When the first food parcels arrived, we helped the NGOs organise and distribute the boxes. We asked the community to do a line, and once they received their parcels, we wrote their names down, identifying from which house they were coming from” (Interview, October 2020).* For Peter, despite initial discussions, the dwellers could receive the help being offered. *“At the beginning, there were discussions and small fights while queuing to receive the food parcels. But at the end, I think it was quite well organised by the NGOs and the area committee” (Focus Group, February 2021).* The Magangeni area committee was also in charge of organising the help coming from the ward councillor. According to Thomas, *“The councillor took time to come and help. But he also brought food parcels, vouchers for the supermarket, and hand sanitisers… The same as we did when we received the food parcels from the NGOs, we wrote down who was receiving the food, the vouchers, and the sanitisers, to make sure everybody was getting equal help” (Interview, October 2020).* And while for most of the dwellers, those vouchers did not cover their expenses, they appreciated the help. As Joshua described, *“Those vouchers did not allow us to buy many things for our families, but at that time, every little help was highly appreciated” (Joshua, Focus Group, February 2021).*

While different NGOs and the ward committee helped with food parcels and sanitisers, a researcher of UTFS, who had been working in the settlement for several years (as examined in the previous chapters), helped with the provision of facemasks. As Joshua remembers, *“There was this woman from a local university who brought us some facemasks. It was the same woman who had been doing some research here in the settlement for the last few years. She is always trying to help us” (Focus Group, February 2021).* Martin, who is also part of a research team the UTFS researcher formed in the settlement (see Chapter V), explained that *“As a research team, we have a WhatsApp group with her, so before the lockdown was implemented, I met with her nearby the settlement, and she gave me several reusable facemasks to distribute to the rest of our team and our relatives. Over the weeks, she sent us more facemasks so that we could handle them to the area committee for them to distribute them amongst the rest of the dwellers” (Interview, February 2021).* However, for some of the research participants, the reason behind wearing a facemask was not much about preventing the risk of infections in the settlement. For Joshua, *“The main reason for wearing facemasks for people of our settlement was because we didn’t want to pay a fine or go to jail. We were told that we would be arrested and paid a fine if we were seen in public without wearing the facemask. If not, we would be imprisoned for seven days” (Focus Group, February 2021).* In the same vein, Lucy, one of the secretaries of Magangeni committee, suggested that *“Even those who didn’t believe the virus was real started noticing that the use of facemasks was important. They also noticed that they were not allowed to enter public places without a mask” (Focus Group, February 2021).* Arguably, another reason why dwellers decided to wear a facemask was provided by Jonathan. He suggested that *“Facemasks eventually turned a success here in the settlement because people turned it into a trending fashion. People started making their own masks for matching whatever they were wearing” (Focus Group February 2021)*.

Martin also recalls that the municipality organised the fumigation of different informal settlements in the area during the first months of the pandemic. *“There was an organisation that formed a partnership with the municipality to fumigate and apply sanitiser throughout our informal settlement. It was an excellent initiative to eliminate the risks of being infected by the disease. Here in the settlement, if you happen to sneeze or cough, the disease can spread easily as our shacks are very close to each other. Besides, we know that the passageways that connect our settlement are too small. Sometimes there is less than a meter separating two houses. That is why when we walk here in the settlement, we end up touching different surfaces. We also touch the same surfaces when using the same toilets, taps, etc. If the person before you have touched the tap with infected hands, there could be 99% of chances for you to be infected by the virus. Happily, most of those surfaces and walls were sanitised” (Narrative photovoice, December 2020).* By May 2020, there had been no reported cases of Covid-19 in Magangeni.

When the President of South Africa announced a nationwide lockdown informing the country was at war against an invisible enemy, nobody in Magangeni informal settlement was very sure of what that meant. Many dwellers decided to leave the place to go back home to rural areas and reunite with their families. In the meantime, the settlement received help from different stakeholders. This considered the provision of food parcels, vouchers, sanitisers, and facemasks, among others. This subsection described how the area committee conducted the distribution of these goods and the organising of the dwellers. The national lockdown was partly eased on May 1 2020. But for the dwellers of Magangeni, the worst was yet to come. The loss of jobs, an overcrowded settlement, and a higher level of poverty and hunger were issues they had to deal with. The following subsection examines these challenges.

7.1.3 *Living unemployed and organising in an overpopulated area*

Life in Magangeni is conditioned by informality. People who live in the informal settlement usually work in informal jobs. Among the research participants are street vendors, part-time construction labourers, and domestic workers. *“We live in shacks and access informal jobs. That is the story of our lives. Most of the people who live in our settlement are unemployed. And from those few of us who have a job, it is usually in the informal sector”*, explained Thomas before the pandemic outbreak *(Personal interview, March 2020).* A few weeks after the interview, he lost his job. As Glacia, one of the secretaries of the area committee, described, *“The biggest challenge for the settlement, since the lockdown started in mid-March, was the loss of jobs” (Personal interview, October 2020).* Considering the volatility and precariousness of informality, no one was surprised that many people of Magangeni would lose their jobs during the pandemic. However, not many people dimensioned how long it would last.

For Penny, the loss of jobs brought a lot of pain and suffering to the people of Magangeni. In the focus group conducted in February 2021, she reflected that “*After a year since the outbreak, the people who lost their jobs are still struggling to put food on the table for their families” (Focus group February 2021).* On the same occasion, Peter described that after losing his job in March 2020, he was *“still struggling to make a living. I applied for the government’s social grant of emergency, but that was far from being enough to cover all of the needs we had as a family”[[11]](#footnote-11) (Focus group, February 2021)*. After losing their jobs during the pandemic, the main source of income for the subaltern came from government social grants. Yet, these were not enough to cover their basic needs. For Martin, *“The role of our government is to protect us, the most vulnerable. If there are no jobs, the least they can do is provide us with basic services and food. They should have also provided us with free facemasks. They should have operated just like how it’s done with condoms because this is the same situation. Everyone needs protection, whether you can afford it or not” (Personal conversation, February 2021).*

Basic services and food prices rose during the pandemic to make things even harder for the informal settlement dwellers. For Thomas, *“Food prices, and almost every basic need, went up. How were people going to pay for such expensive items if they were not working?” (Focus group, February 2021)* Furthermore, according to Joshua, many local food markets had to close, *“and shopping centres and malls were too expensive for us to buy our basic goods. In the end, we had to rely on food parcels and vouchers from the municipality or different NGOs” (Focus group, February 2021).* The job losses and increased costs of essential services deteriorated the living conditions of the subaltern in Magangeni. For Carlton, an area committee member, the challenges have slightly changed after the pandemic. “*Our biggest challenges are now the levels of poverty and hunger in the settlement. There are no jobs out there. It is not that we don’t want to work, but there are no opportunities. In the meantime, we still must feed our families... and we’re struggling” (Interview, October 2020).* For Peter, “*The municipality keeps on telling us that if we don’t have any income, we should apply for the social grants that the government offers. There is one for the elderly, one for children[[12]](#footnote-12)… but it is not enough. We came here* (to live in the settlement) *in search of better opportunities, but now we have no jobs, and life is turning too expensive” (Focus group, February 2021).*

For Lucy, another big challenge during the pandemic was *“to control the people for them not to meet in high volumes and stay indoors with their households. The overcrowding we suffer makes it very difficult for the settlers to obey social distancing rule*” *(Interview, October 2020).* In that sense, for Martin, local taverns were an example where people did not comply with social distancing rules. *“In the taverns in the settlement, you could see more than thirty people staying indoors, touching the same surfaces without washing their hands. They would share beers and drink from the same bottle between six or more people… putting themselves at risk of being infected” (Narrative photovoice, December 2020).* The functioning of local taverns did not only put dwellers at risk of being infected but went against the law. As previously examined, the sale of alcohol was supposed to be forbidden during the lockdown. Arguably, the gathering and drinking in taverns also increased the settlement's crime, rape, and gender-based violence levels (see Chapter V). For Penny, the overcrowding in Magangeni not only represented a challenge regarding the taverns but the ablution facilities too. *“When people lost their jobs, the settlement became even more overcrowded during the day. That was a huge problem considering we only have a few toilet containers for all of us who live here” (Focus group, February 2021).* As Lucy described, *“The numbers of people trying to use the toilets during the lockdown was insane. People started to fight and complain because of the conditions in which the toilets were being left. Everybody wanted to use them, but nobody cared or was responsible for cleaning them. You cannot expect something to work if many of us use it, but nobody takes care of it”. (Interview, October 2020)* Joshua concludes that the same happened with the toilet facilities for men. *“At some point, the overcrowding of people made the toilet cabs collapse… so the committee decided to close them”. (Focus group, February 2021)* By March 2021, only two toilet cabs were working for the whole of Magangeni informal settlement.

As examined in this first part of the chapter, during the pandemic, Magangeni dwellers were dependent on the help they could receive to have something to eat at the end of the day. The loss of jobs resulted in more overcrowding during the day and higher exposure to Covid-19 infections. Consequently, social distancing and washing hands were not easy to comply with considering the settlement context. As Joshua reflected in the focus group, *“How did they expect us to keep social distancing, wash our hands regularly and cover our faces; if the settlement is overcrowded, we lack even basic sanitation, and there is no money to buy facemasks?” (Focus Group, February 2021)*. The second part of this chapter analyses the power dynamics and organising of the subalterns amidst the pandemic. The first subsection analyses each of the challenges identified by the research participants through the lens of the power cube framework. In so doing, it examines the different levels, spaces, and forms of power affecting Magangeni informal settlement after the lockdown restrictions implemented by the South African Government. The second subsection, in turn, reflects on subalternity and urban informality as a critical analysis site to understand how processes underpinning economic, social, and political inequality might emerge and perpetuate in Magangeni informal settlement.

* 1. **Analysis**

***7.2.1 Gaventa’s power cube framework***

*7.2.1.1 Power dynamics amidst lockdown restrictions*

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Self-identified challenge**  | **Levels of power** | **Spaces of power** | **Forms of power** | **Actors involved** |
| Lockdown measures | National/Municipal/ Neighbourhood | Closed | Visible | Government, municipalities, Informal settlement committee |

By the end of March 2020, the South African Minister of Human Settlement, Water and Sanitation, Lindiwe Sisulu, announced a range of measures to be taken in ‘highly dense’ informal settlements to pre-empt a large-scale outbreak. At a national level, for the South African government and civil society organisations, it was urgent to provide informal settlements with minimum standards and basic needs to ameliorate the infection risks and overcome hunger. Arguably, the help being offered did not question the conditions the dwellers lived in but the needs they had to fulfil to survive. The range of measures announced by the government included the urgent rollout of water, sanitation, and hand-washing facilities in communities lacking formal water and sanitation supply, as well as the ‘de-densification’ of 29 overcrowded settlements identified as being at particular risk of COVID-19 transmission” (Pieterse, 2021, p.37). As examined in the findings, the authority also informed that there had identified land ‘not far’ from these settlements to establish temporary relocation areas, to which some inhabitants would be moved. Yet, she did not provide details about its implementation.

The lack of further information brought deep concern for social justice advocacy groups who interpreted that de-densification was just a fancier word for forced eviction. In that sense, fourteen civil society organisations wrote a joint statement raising their concern that the ‘de-densification’ was a time-consuming, resource-intensive, socially complex and contested process, which would disrupt people’s livelihoods and risk intensifying their marginalisation (Pieterse, 2021). Likewise, UN-Habitat urged that only evictions and relocations directly aimed at preventing contagion among residents should be allowed. As examined in Chapter V, the Upgrading of Informal Settlements Programme (UISP) introduced by the South African Government in 2004 allowed municipalities to apply for funding to develop basic community facilities and to upgrade dwellings in cooperation with community members, being the eviction or relocation of residents only a matter of last resort (Dupont et al., 2016).

Yet, according to research participants, the South African president had also announced that all eviction orders would automatically be suspended until the country moved to a ‘lower lockdown alert level’. In that sense, for Magangeni settlers, the Minister’s announcement created high levels of uncertainty too. On the one hand, the settlers felt prepared to fight for their rights and resist eviction. On the other hand, they knew that, under lockdown restrictions, any protest or mass gathering would end up with them being arrested. If their final decision was to protest, they could risk not only their houses but their freedom. By implementing restrictive rules, the government intended to maintain order and control through what Gaventa (2006) categorises as visible forms of power, in this case, the political power of the national authority in a coercive manner over the most marginalised.

Arguably, the message being sent by the government was as contradictory as the existing housing policies in the country. As examined in Chapter V, first, the South African Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) introduced by the ruling party (ANC) after Apartheid aimed to eradicate all informal settlements (Braathen et al., 2014). Then in the early 2000s, the Breaking New Ground Policy included the Upgrading Informal Settlements Programme (UISP), which increased flexibility in planning and focused on providing social services and economic amenities to informal settlements (Dupont et al., 2016). At a municipal level, Langutani municipality was one of the local governments that engaged with several stakeholders in an incremental upgrading informal settlement programme providing different levels of upgrading and services to the settlements in Langutani (Sutherland et al., 2018). However, no matter the intentions of Langutani and some other municipalities on upgrading informal settlements over the last two decades, the national legal framework in South Africa regarding municipal expenditure, spatial planning, and environmental protection would have hindered their efforts. Instead, the local government’s preferred approach to informal settlements would remain one of eradication and evictions over improvement and upgrading (Pieterse, 2021). And this applied even during the pandemic.

Finally, at a neighbourhood level of power, within the informal settlement, the Magangeni committee immediately suspended its meetings after the lockdown announcement. Mass gatherings were forbidden, and a few committee representatives left the settlement to reunite with their families. For those dwellers who remained in the settlement, the instruction was to stay home and safe. This situation helps to illustrate and understand the relational nature of power, where those who are relatively powerless in one setting may be more powerful in others (Gaventa, 2005). At a national level, the informal settlement committee, both as individuals and as part of the community, had to accept and adapt to the government norms and rules of the South African government. In contrast, at a local level, they were the ones imposing the restrictions and the conditions on the rest of the informal settlement. As further addressed in this chapter, while the committee would not meet for the first few months after the outbreak, those representatives who stayed in Magangeni would still organise the help being received.

This subsection discussed how visible forms of power were experienced in closed spaces of participation across national, local, and neighbourhood levels of power amidst lockdown restrictions in Magangeni informal settlement. The following subsection discusses the second self-identified challenge, namely help and organising during the pandemic. It analyses the partnership between the South African government and NGOs and the impact of these power dynamics on the lives and organising of the informal settlement dwellers.

*7.2.1.2 Epistemic violence re-visited: Government- NGOs partnership in closed spaces of participation*

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Self-identified challenge**  | **Levels of power** | **Spaces of power** | **Forms of power** | **Actors involved** |
| Help and organising in times of Covid-19 | National/Municipal/ Neighbourhood | Closed/Invited | Visible | Government, NGOs, Informal settlement dwellers |

The levels of uncertainty that Magangeni dwellers felt after the government announcements, were shared by other informal settlements across the country. By May 2020, none of them had been invited to discuss the help they could need or the different ways they could organise to receive the government’s support. Informal settlements were not being invited to sit at the table with the decision-makers. Excluded from the decision-making and facing the risk of being arrested if they resisted, informal settlements’ voice was not expected to be heard or considered during the de-densification process. On April 29 2020 (a month since the lockdown started), the minister of Human Settlement, Water and Sanitation announced that the government was having conversations with NGOs with expertise working in informal settlements. The government wanted to hear from the experience of those working on the ground, hence the decision of inviting civil society actors. On the occasion, the minister also mentioned that different NGOs suggested it was better not to use the term de-densifying but rather re-blocking and resettlement to avoid misunderstandings. By the end of April, from the twenty-nine land parcels that the government was being prepared for resettlements, none of them was in Langutani (South African Government, 2020).

The government’s decision of relocating informal settlements was planned under closed spaces of power but, arguably, implemented through invited spaces of participation. If spaces of power are the opportunities and moments where the individuals-or the community- can act to influence policies and decisions that may affect their lives and interests (Gaventa, 2006), the decision of de-densifying/evicting/re-blocking informal settlements during the pandemic was made behind doors by the South African government with no intention of including other actors. Once the de-densifying decision was taken, and arguably due to their expertise in the informal settlements, the government invited NGOs to engage in the process of implementation. Which NGOs and their role in the process were not informed to the public (at least not during the first months of lockdown when the data for this research was being collected).

And while the government invited NGOs to the table, the invitation was not extended to those living in informal settlements. In silencing subaltern voices and asking NGOs to inform them, what the government was arguably doing was perpetuating the marginalisation of the subaltern. The situation experienced by informal settlements reflects what Shivji (20006) criticises when NGOs and other development stakeholders speak and act on behalf of the voiceless. For the scholar, the marginalised are mostly reduced to “the subject matter of papers on strategies for poverty reduction, authored by consultants and discussed at stakeholders’ workshops in which, NGOs represent the ‘poor’. The ‘poor’, the diseased, the disabled, the AIDS-infected, the ignorant, the marginalised, in short, the ‘people’, are not part of the development equation” (Shivji, 2006, p.35). Furthermore, what NGOs were doing when partnering with the government was arguably contributing to excluding the people they claimed to defend. In other words, NGOs ran the risk of speaking on behalf of the most marginalised and perpetuating an act of epistemic violence. As previously discussed in Chapter VI, for Spivak (1988), not speaking for themselves or having their contributions recognised is a form of oppression and violence inflicted on the subalterns.

According to Shivji (2004), by being partners in policymaking, NGOs would abdicate to their main role, namely, being a watchdog of government policies. For the scholar, NGOs must not substitute themselves for the people, as they are neither the elected representatives of the people nor mandated to represent them. On the contrary, the prime duty of NGOs and other advocacy groups would be to enable popular participation in policymaking institutions. To help the marginalised claim spaces for themselves, against the power holders, and reject those spaces created without them. In other words, according to the scholar, NGOs, and civil society organisations, should not be partners of, and hold a stake in, the very system which oppresses the large majority. This discussion brings back the question of the role of NGOs (see section 3.2.1). Whether NGOs should assume a ‘democratising role’ dealing with the weaknesses of the state in service-delivery (Clarke, 1998; Mercer, 2002) or if they should be responsible for a structural transformation of the society developing a closer relationship with the subaltern and engaging with them in the co-production of knowledge (Escobar, 1995; Mitlin et al., 2007) are still part of the debate in international development literature. This research has intended to move beyond the binaries of democratic/emancipatory practices, understanding the manifold ways NGOs relate with both the government and the subaltern and the dynamic and complex scenarios civil society represents (Hasenfeld and Grieden, 2005; Lipietz, 2013; Pithouse, 2013).

This subsection has examined how help and organising during Covid-19 in Magangeni informal settlement were impacted through visible forms of power in closed and invited spaces of participation across different levels, involving the government, NGOs and the informal settlement dwellers. The following subsection addresses the third challenge identified by the participants after the Covid-19 outbreak, namely the overcrowding and job losses during the pandemic.

* + - 1. *Organising strategies and overcrowding amidst the pandemic*

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Self-identified challenge**  | **Levels of power** | **Spaces of power** | **Forms of power** | **Actors involved** |
| Organising and overcrowding in Magangeni amidst the pandemic | Municipality/ Neighbourhood | Invited/ Claimed | Visible | Municipality/ NGOs/ Private donors/ Informal settlement dwellers |

Since the nationwide lockdown announcement, Magangeni informal settlement received help from different stakeholders. According to the research participants, the municipality and civil society organisations provided sanitisers, food parcels and vouchers, and facemasks between March and April 2020. During those months, the informal settlement was also fumigated thanks to a collaborative action between the municipality and a private organisation. The latter was part of a nationwide plan organised by the Ministry of Human Settlement, Water and Sanitation. When the help arrived in the settlement, it was coordinated and distributed by both the donor (councillor, NGO, or other) and representatives of the informal settlement committee. However, research participants agree that when the collaboration comes from the municipality, this usually arrives late and is not enough considering the number of dwellers who live in the informal settlement. In this case, NGOs, civil society organisations, and private initiatives helped deliver what the local government could not fulfil. As described in the findings, when it gets to short-term relief, there are always people, other than the government, offering their help in Magangeni.

Besides, there were several rules the dwellers could (and did) not comply with considering the informal settlement challenges. Social distancing was not feasible when living in an overcrowded area; washing hands frequently was not an option when facing problems accessing water, and the compulsory use of facemasks was an issue as the research participants explained they did not have money to buy one. Whether they received them as a donation from one of the stakeholders or because they did them themselves, eventually, most dwellers got a facemask. However, most of them only wore the facemasks when leaving the informal settlement. They knew that it was mandatory to cover their faces when going to a shop or using public transport, but they would remove them once they got back to Magangeni. Arguably, the threat was not the virus, but being fined or imprisoned. Most dwellers had lost their jobs during the pandemic and struggled to get an alternative income. Getting a fine because of not wearing a facemask was a cost they were unwilling to pay. The dwellers were aware of the visible forms of power the government and the police had over them and the costs of not following those rules.

*7.2.1.4 Summary*

The first part of this analysis section discussed the challenges identified by the research participants in terms of power dynamics and organising after the Covid-19 outbreak. It first examined how and to what extent the lockdown measures and restrictions in South Africa were impacted across levels, spaces, and forms of power, involving several actors. This first subsection discussed how visible forms of power were experienced in closed spaces of participation across national, local, and neighbourhood levels of power amidst lockdown restrictions in Magangeni informal settlement. The other two subsections then reviewed how the help received by the dwellers and the overcrowded conditions of the informal settlement were also affected by the power dynamics and its different actors. In that sense, it examined how help and organising during the pandemic were impacted through visible forms of power in closed and invited spaces of participation across different levels, involving the government, NGOs and the informal settlement dwellers. In so doing, it brought back the discussion of the role of NGOs and the epistemic violence they could perpetuate when aiming to represent the subalterns. Finally, this section discussed how Magangeni informal settlement dealt with the overcrowding and the hardship amidst the pandemic. Table 7B summarises the above.

*Table 7B: Power dynamics across self-identified challenges amidst the pandemic*

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Self-identified challenge**  | **Levels of power** | **Spaces of power** | **Forms of power** | **Actors involved** |
| Lockdown measures | National/Municipal/ Neighbourhood | Closed | Visible | Government/ Municipalities/ Informal settlement committee |
| Help and organising in times of Covid-19 | National/Municipal/ Neighbourhood | Closed/Invited | Visible | Government/ NGOs/ Informal settlement dwellers |
| Organising and overcrowding in Magangeni amidst the pandemic | Municipality/ Neighbourhood | Invited/ Claimed | Visible | Municipality/ NGOs/ Private donors/ Informal settlement dwellers |

The following section reflects on how and to what extent the findings of this chapter reinforce the need to address the organising of the subalterns as part of a broader debate on inclusion, social justice, and participation. Drawing on the empirical material presented in the previous pages, the section analyses the burdens of Covid-19 in Magangeni informal settlement and to what extent and how the pandemic highlighted the marginalisation and subjugation of different subaltern groups. Consequently, it reflects on two of the subaltern groups that arguably faced more challenges amidst the pandemic, namely women and undocumented migrants.

* + 1. ***The subalterns as being othered and othering within the subaltern community***

Informal settlements accommodate more than 60% of the urban population of sub-Saharan Africa (UN-Habitat, 2020). From a community-based approach, one of the critical lessons of the Covid-19 pandemic in African cities was the need to upgrade informal settlements in a participatory way to reduce both the risk of infectious disease and social inequities (Smit, 2020; Wilkinson, 2020). The lockdown measures implemented by the government meant that more dwellers had to stay home during the day compared to the pre-lockdown period. This put pressure, for example, on the already stressed and shared toilet facilities making most of the dwellers prefer the nearby bushes for toilets, which, in turn, increased the risk of contracting and spreading the disease (Nyashanu et al., 2020). For Ramparsad (2021), dwellers using communal toilets with no access to warm water or electricity could hardly maintain social hygiene and keep up with the hygiene standards expected during the Covid-19 pandemic. As examined in this chapter, residents of Magangeni informal settlement were particularly at risk of Covid-19 considering factors such as the lack of adequate water supply and sanitation and the overcrowded living conditions making it almost impossible to practice good hygiene or social distancing. In that sense, transmission vulnerability is, according to Wilkinson (2020), one of the most critical potential burdens of Covid-19 in informal settlements. According to the scholar, transmission dynamics encompass vulnerabilities related to social mixing, housing, and hygiene infrastructure. Consequently, Wilkinson describes informal settlers as people who would count with little opportunities for social distancing, and move between homes, share spaces and food, use toilets that are usually outside people’s homes and in shared facilities, and often maintain strong ties with home regions travelling between urban and rural settings frequently. As previously described, Magangeni dwellers faced challenges of density, mobility, access to water, toilets, and sanitation during the pandemic.

In a national review of informal urban settlements in South Africa, Chitsamatanga and Ntlama-Makhanya (2021) found the worsening of underlying health conditions, plummeting of unemployment levels, loss of livelihoods, and household food insecurity due to Covid-19. According to the study, numerous informal businesses in informal settlements such as liquor stores and local taverns were forced to close and never open again, which increased poverty levels. In the same vein, Smit (2020) concludes informal settlement dwellers are particularly vulnerable to economic shocks such as lockdown restrictions, as most of them have precarious short-term sources of income from informal trade or casual work. Consequently, informal sectors would hardly generate extra cash for use during challenging times like the pandemic lockdown (Nyashanu et al., 2020). Regarding food insecurity in Magangeni informal settlement, households not only could not store food for several days, but they sourced most of their food from informal markets and street vendors that were closed during the lockdown restrictions. According to Nyashanu, et.al. (ibid.), a shortage of food among already deprived people could have also exacerbated the contraction of different infections and the development of malnutrition conditions in children (something that due to time and resource limitations went beyond the scope of this research).

Together with children, two subaltern groups that arguably faced more challenges during the lockdown were women and undocumented migrants. Amidst the pandemic, migrants were far from their original homes, and (often) had no access to reliable information in their own language. Many migrants lost their [precarious] jobs, and others were detained or forced to return home, treated inhumanely and stigmatised (Wilkinson, 2020). As emerged from the findings, undocumented migrantswereomitted from the South African government’s response plans due to their irregular legal conditions in the country. In Magangeni, it was only after the involvement of NGOs and other civil society actors, that migrants eventually had access to basic services and protective equipment. A further discussion about undocumented migrants and subalternity in Magangeni is developed in the following chapter. In the case of subaltern women, Chitsamatanga and Ntlama-Makhanya study in informal settlements in South Africa (2021) also found a predominance of gender-based violence due to Covid-19. For Nyashanu, et al. (2020), high levels of stress and depression experienced due to Covid-19 in informal settlements eventually led to theft, domestic violence, rape, and sexual abuse. For Ramparsad (2021), the closure of schools and daycare centres also increased childcare needs, which hugely impacted working mothers. In Magangeni, some female research participants lost their jobs, while others had to quit to take care of their children. In that context, they were obliged to stay more at home and have a higher exposure to intimate partner violence.

As examined in Chapter VI, research participants experienced and highlighted the importance of difference and heterogeneity in Magangeni informal settlement. It identified subaltern women as a complex and heterogeneous group that had been doubly subjugated by patriarchy and colonialism, and triply marginalised in the Global South for being black, poor, and women (Spivak, 1988). From a decolonial feminist perspective, the chapter reflected on creating a plurality of knowledge whereby all cultures remained equal. As such, all individuals and communities had the right to be different precisely because everyone was considered equal (Manning, 2021). As further examined in Chapter VIII, undocumented migrants faced a new level of subjugation amidst the pandemic. Not being able to access the government’s help amidst the pandemic, nor to go back to their countries due to lack of economic resources, the undocumented migrants were dependent on the help of civil society organisations. The undocumented immigrants living in the informal settlement did not have the same rights that their South African neighbours. In that sense, it has arguably been in the attribution of difference that the logic of dominance and subordination would have had expression. For Pandey (2006), men are not considered different; women are. Accordingly, in Magangeni, it would not be the South African nationals the different; it is the immigrants the different, who are othered within this space. Consequently, Pandey suggests there would be a critical and unexplored relationship between dominance/subordination and the attribution of difference. This insight could also help analyse the situation of women and immigrants subjugated in multiple ways. Different as poor, different as black, different as woman, and different as a migrant. In the words of Pandey, difference as subalternity. Subalternity as difference. The scholar´s point is not that the issue of difference must be added to that of subalternity, but “to recognise that they appear all too often as one and the same thing. The foregrounding of gender, caste, race, etc., in this manner, as so many ways of organising subalternity, may help to complicate and deepen our understanding of social and political power, even as we work to expose the roots of contemporary as well as past prejudice and discrimination, and refashion the project of turning the world upside down” (Pandey, 2006, p.4740). As exposed in the previous sections, in South Africa, the ‘informal’ has been ‘the different’ and ‘the other’, which needs to be changed. The ‘de-densification’ of informal settlements and the government’s invitation to NGOs to speak on behalf of the informal settlement dwellers were different demonstrations of power that excluded and subjugated the subalterns living in informality. For Pandey (ibid.), subalternity would, therefore, face a paradox. By illustrating Hegel’s abstraction of the master-slave relationship where the slave must be recognised to give recognition to the master, and yet their enslavement must be maintained; for Pandey, the subaltern would be a necessary presence that cannot be spirited away, and yet cannot fully belong. Consequently, the subalterns would have to be the same and yet different simultaneously. As the scholar concludes, difference would not be privileged, yet it must not be entirely denied.

***7.2.3 Conclusion***

This chapter provided a space for the voices of people more usually marginalised by mainstream management and organisational studies. As examined throughout this work, this is where the methodological contribution of this research lies to the field of management and organisation studies, providing an insight into organising practices and narratives that are ignored in mainstream western management and organisation literature and opening new spaces to those who have been made voiceless in the knowledge production of these studies in the Global South.

Section 7.2.1 discussed how visible forms of power were experienced in closed and invited spaces of participation across national, local, and neighbourhood levels of power amidst lockdown restrictions in Magangeni informal settlement. Section 7.2.2, in turn, reflected on the social and economic inequalities experienced by the subalterns and how the pandemic highlighted their differences and marginalisation. The subsection first discussed the social and economic inequalities experienced by the subalterns amidst the pandemic and the burdens of transmission vulnerability (associated with overcrowding and hygiene infrastructure) to which they were exposed. It then reflected how difference and subalternity are related and the impact this has had on the subaltern groups most affected by the pandemic. Overall, section 7.2.2 aimed to provide more insights into the discussion on the complexities of the subalterns organising in Magangeni, acknowledging their multiple and heterogeneous identities, overlapping positions, and shifting alliances beyond fixed and mutually exclusive categories suggested in mainstream MOS. In so doing, it aimed to address another research aim of this thesis, namely, to examine the organising of the subalterns as part of a broader debate on inclusion, social justice, and participation.

Chapter VIII describes how Magangeni informal settlement dwellers organised themselves after a devastating fire in October 2020. The chapter intends to examine the different power dynamics at stake after the fire outbreak, the stakeholders involved in those dynamics, and how did they interact. In so doing, it aims to discuss to what extent these power dynamics can alter or perpetuate the factors of subjugation the subalterns face in the informal settlement. Consequently, the chapter explores the complexities of the subalterns organising in Magangeni during and after the fire outbreak, addressing their multiple identities, heterogeneity, and different subjugations in a context of vulnerability and deprivation.

**Chapter VIII: Power dynamics and organising after the fire**

As previously discussed, a key theme of this research is to examine the power dynamics and complexities of the subalterns’ organising in Magangeni informal settlement. In doing so, this study aims to give space for the subaltern to get their voice heard and present their needs and their understandings and solutions to their challenges. In the spirit of these aims and objectives, Nikiwe, one of the co-researchers, suggested analysing how Magangeni informal settlement was organised after a devastating fire in October 2020 (as discussed in the Methodology chapter).

The structure of this chapter mirrors the structure used in Chapters VI and VII. There is first a findings section, through which a space is provided for the voices of people usually marginalised from mainstream management and organisational studies literature. This account draws on data gathered about a fire that broke out in the settlement. The account addresses two related topics: organising the help offered by stakeholders’ following the fire and the challenges the fire caused the research participants. These topics ‘Organising stakeholders’ help’ and ‘Magangeni informal settlement as a space of deprivation and vulnerability’ are summarised in Table 8A. The two topics are elaborated further in the analysis section that follows the table, focusing down on the power dynamics and forms of organising in response to the fire.

The research participants self-identified challenges and presented and discussed in relation to a) visible and invisible forms of power that shape these dynamics and b) both the invited and self-claimed spaces of participation. In so doing, this analysis identifies the different actors involved in those power dynamics and how these actors interact. Building on this analysis, the links between subalternity and the dwellers organising after the fire outbreak are explored. This is achieved through an analysis of the relationships between ‘difference’, subalternity, and the role of NGOs after the fire. Importantly, forms of organising by the dwellers include self-identified solutions to reduce their levels of vulnerability and cope with future fire outbreaks and these are discussed next. Finally, the section considers how and to what extent the organising of the dwellers after the fire outbreak relates to what has been considered a critical feature of South African subalterns’ organisation since the return of democracy - namely, debates around whether securing narrow improvements within local residential areas is a better approach than seeking large-scale transformations.

*Table 8A: Summary of Findings: self-identified challenges after the fire*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Self-identified challenges** | **Main issues and solutions involved** |
| *8.1.1 Organising stakeholders’ help* | - Municipality: main supplier, but sometimes late and discriminatory.- Other stakeholders: covered basic needs and arrived on short notice.- Magangeni informal settlement committee is recognised as a valid voice for both authorities and dwellers. |
| *8.1.2 Magangeni informal settlement as a space of deprivation and vulnerability* | - Poor structural quality of housing-Overcrowding- Lack of security- Lack of access to basic services/ Illegal connections to water and electricity. Research participants think the municipality should provide the informal settlement with legal electricity connections to help prevent fire incidents. The dwellers also highlight the need for better access to water and the relevance of having fire hydrants closer to the settlement. They believe these measures can help them save time, shacks, and eventually, lives. |

**8.1 Narrative accounts of the fire**

 *“The moment we saw the fire, our hearts were beating so fast. We couldn’t think properly. We panicked. We were shaking. Some people were having difficulties breathing. Some cried. Some just kept staring at what was happening, while some others climbed their roofs trying to throw water to extinguish the fire. Some took the chance to steal from the victims’ houses….”*

***(Lydia, Focus group, February 2021)***

*“I saw many weak women crying instead of taking their belongings. I was brave enough to know what I had to do as a man. I never panic. I just thought of taking my belongings and then helping those in need”.*

***(Ryan, Focus group, February 2021)***

*“After experiencing a couple of fire incidents in this place, I think that when an incident like this happens next to your house, you panic, and you don’t know what to do. But when the incident is far from your shack, you think fast, and you get enough strength to help others”.*

***(Mary, Focus group, February 2021)***

One hundred and six houses were burnt, three dwellers died, and many other people were wounded in a devastating fire in Magangeni on 31 October 2020. Nikiwe, one of the co-researchers, remembers that day when she and her sister woke up and noticed a fire. *“It was a rainy morning. At 6 am me and my sister woke up because people were shouting out loud, ‘Fire, fire… it’s burning; please help!’ The minute we heard that we jumped out of bed and went outside to see what was happening. We wanted to cry when we saw the huge blaze, but there was no time for that. The shacks were burning so fast… so I called the firefighters and then ran to help those who were most in need*” (*Interview, November 2020).*

Julia lost her house and most of her belongings after the fire. She remembers that morning hearing people screaming there was a fire. *“I woke up breathing heavily and looked for the house keys. My hands were shaking, so my partner took the keys and opened the door. The fire flames were about 15 meters from our house, so she put some essential clothes in a bag and asked me to run. I was crying. We both put on our shoes and ran, leaving most of our personal belongings inside. We could see from the distance how our shack was burning... We could do nothing else, as the fire was too big, and it was quickly spreading from one shack to another. It was a real nightmare” (Focus Group, February 2021).* According to Nikiwe, while some dwellers were “just running for their lives”, others were helping to control the fire until the firefighters arrived. There were also a few who decided to demolish their shacks. “*The community tried to fight the fire down as it was expanding rapidly to the other shacks. While the firefighters were still on their way, we cut the electric wires and collected as many buckets as possible. I remember we tried to fight the fire with those buckets of water, but the flames were too powerful. To control the fire, some decided to demolish their shacks… so that the fire did not spread further. It was a tough decision because starting from scratch is never easy. You feel defeated and confused because you start to wonder how long it took you to have what you had, and then, in the blink of an eye, it’s all gone… When, after 15 minutes maybe, the fire trucks finally reached our place, we asked our neighbours to stay away from the fire and let the firefighters do their job”* *(Interview, November 2020).*

The fire started due to a discussion earlier that night in one of the informal settlement taverns. As Nikiwe recalls, “*The night before the fire incident, three people were fighting other neighbours in the tavern. Because of that, some friends took them home, asking them to stay there and go to sleep. But they didn’t want to sleep, so they went back to the tavern. Once again, their friends sent them back to sleep, but this time they locked their door so that they could not get out. It is suspected that, after being locked, one of them was hungry and started to cook. After plugging and switching on the electric stove, we think that the three of them fell asleep on the bed they shared. It was a matter of minutes, or maybe seconds after their whole house burnt… Then the fire spread very quickly, destroying more than a hundred houses in our settlement*” *(Interview, November 2020).* It took almost an hour before the firefighters could extinguish the fire.

In the focus group conducted in February 2021, the research participants rebuilt what had happened. Once the fire was extinguished, “*The firefighters looked around the place and noticed three dead bodies were lying on a mattress in one of the shacks” (Julia, Focus Group, February 2021). “We immediately identified the house of the victims and who the victims were. There were two women from Eastern Cape Province, aged 24 and 27, and one 30-year-old male from Malawi. The three of them were very friendly” (Eddie, Focus group, February 2021). “It was a very sad and traumatising day for all of us. I remember the firefighters covering the bodies and asking the police to call the mortuary services” (Lydia, Focus Group, February 2021).* As had happened with previous emergencies, the informal settlement dwellers knew what they had to do next.As Eddie described, *“The next step was to inform the names of the victims to the informal settlement committee*” *(Focus Group, February 2021)*. This way, the informal settlement committee could contact their relatives and inform the local authorities. Impacted because of what happened, Nikiwe takes time to reflect and empathise with those neighbours who lost everything they had. *“The fire resulted in the loss of lives, houses, and personal belongings. It left many people confused, traumatised, and shocked. After a fire like this brings your house down, you are not thinking straight, and you don’t even want to sleep. You feel tired of wondering what to do and where to go… Many neighbours were left with the clothes they were wearing only. The fire left people homeless, and everything that they have worked for, burnt to ashes” (Narrative photovoice, January 2021).*

*8.1.1 Organising stakeholders’ help*

The fire was controlled by 7 am. That same day the dwellers started organising themselves. As Eddie recalls, *“Some neighbours started clearing their sites, making a place to build their new shacks. However, most of us were not that proactive and were only concerned with asking our relatives and friends if they could receive us in their shacks for some days” (Eddie, Focus group, February 2021).* This situation might not differ from what occurs after every fire or flood affecting Magangeni. The dwellers understand the risky conditions they live in and the consequences they are exposed to. As Julia described it, *“It is the story of our lives. Our shacks will fall, and we will rebuild them. The same happens with our lives. We can fall many times, but we will always stand up and carry on” (Focus group, February 2021).*

The day after the incident, a representative of the Municipality Department of Disaster Management visited the informal settlement and examined the place. Nikiwe describes the help they received and how they organised themselves in the informal settlement committee. *“They offered us a big tent for the fire victims and asked us where to install it. The councillor and our committee’s chairperson agreed that the best place to install it was at the informal settlement entrance, just next to the ablution blocks. We then called for an open meeting and told all the victims that they were expected to sleep in that tent until further notice” (Interview, November 2020).* In the beginning, the idea of sleeping in a tent did not suit the dwellers very good. *“None of us wanted to sleep there because we felt women would not be safe staying in that place. Bear in mind that in the tent, there were men and women, and nothing separated us” (Julia, Focus Group, February 2021).* Yet, after the informal settlement committee intervened, most dwellers agreed that sleeping in that tent could work as a temporary solution. *“The committee convinced us that being there would make as visible for anyone who wanted to help us, so most of the fire victims ended up sleeping in that tent” (Christine, Focus Group, February 2021).*

Various stakeholders showed up in the informal settlement in the following days, offering their help. The first ones to appear in the settlement were the councillor, UTFS, and the Red Cross. *“The councillor brought groceries, mattresses and blankets for the victims. UTFS researchers brought us some clothes… the same as the people of the Red Cross, who also brought us warm food” (Louis, Focus group, February 2021).* As Nikiwe detailed, then it was the municipality’s turn. “*The municipality brought us food parcels that had enough food to feed families of four for four to eight weeks. The parcels contained 10 kg of rice, 10 kg of maize, 10 kg of flour, 10 kg of sugar, 10 kg of potatoes, 5 litres of cooking oil, 1 kg of onions, 1 kg of carrots, one cabbage, 250gr of butter, 100 tea bags, 500 gr of beans, 500 gr of powder milk, 1 kg of instant porridge, 1.5 kg of chicken, soup, one sponge, one blanket, salt, and soap” (Nikiwe, Narrative-photovoice, November 2020).* To help organise the help they received, Nikiwe explained the informal settlement committee’s role. “*As an informal settlement committee, we had a list of all 106 households who lost their shacks after the fire. So, when the municipality trucks came, we asked the families to line up and wait until the people from the municipality finished unloading the food. Each victim had to sign their name in our list” (Narrative-photovoice, November 2020).* According to the research participants, most of the victims followed the instructions, received the food parcels provided by the municipality, and went back to the tent.

In general terms, the victims appreciated the help they received. *“We are very thankful for the help we received because it is a big problem not having basic needs, such as clothing, food, shelter, or personal belongings. We lost our house, and our kids lost their uniforms and books for school too, but at least we have food and a place where to sleep until we build our new shack” (Eddie, Focus Group, February 2021). “We appreciate everything that comes. As they say, let the giving hand be more blessed than the receiver hand. The help we receive from the councillor, NGOs, a local university, and Red Cross is highly appreciated. It gives us hope and shows that life goes on… that you do not have to stay stuck” (Lydia, Focus Group, February 2021).* Yet, some other dwellers also questioned the practicality of that help. “*Where did they expect us to keep the food? Where did they want us to cook the food, considering the tent had no access to electricity? Yes, we are thankful for what they offered us, but we were still left with a lot of unsolved challenges and questions” (Louis, Focus Group, February 2021).* This discontent began to grow as the months passed, and the victims were still living in the tent.

A massive challenge for the victims was knowing how long they would have to live in the emergency tent. After distributing the food parcels in the informal settlement, the municipality promised to deliver building materials so that the victims could build new dwellings. However, after four months (in February 2021), various dwellers were still waiting to receive the raw materials. “*We couldn’t stay for four months living in a tent, so some of us asked our neighbours if they could receive us for some time while we figured out how to get the materials to build our new shacks. But those who are new in the informal settlement faced the challenge of not knowing many people whom to ask such a favour, so they had to stay in the tent” (Christine, Focus Group, February 2021).* As part of the informal settlement committee, Nikiwe has had to deal several times with the municipality to organise and distribute help among the informal settlement dwellers. She explained that when the help arrives late, the informal settlement committee’s role is to calm the rest of the dwellers. *“The local government always acts late. When they started distributing building materials, they came in 27 units, one unit per family. But our community expects to receive all the materials at the same time. So, when that does not happen, it creates a conflict and a problem for us. The victims are more than a hundred, so they must wait. In the meantime, they will come to us, committee members, to complain and say whatever they have to say. Then we will try to explain the situation and ask them to be patient. But how can you ask someone to be patient if they have lost everything from one day to another? (Interview, November 2020).*

According to Julia, this was not the first time they had to wait several months for the government’s help. *“In 2015, there was another fire. Back then, we had to live in tents for seven months. As help from the municipality never arrived, we had to build our new shacks with materials we bought ourselves. Some of us built our houses by the river because that was the only space available here in the settlement. The following year, and because of a flood, we lost those houses too” (Female participant, Focus group, February 2021).* From 2015 to 2020, two big floods and four massive fires affected Magangeni informal settlement. As further addressed in the analysis section, the victims have had no better alternative than to rebuild their shacks in the same settlement. In so doing, they are aware that they are risking their houses, their belongings, and eventually their lives.

This subsection described how Magangeni dwellers self-organised once the fire was controlled. Before the help arrived, some dwellers started re-building their shacks while others asked their relatives and friends for shelter. In the following days, when various stakeholders showed up in the informal settlement offering their help, the informal settlement committee oversaw coordinating and distributing this help to the fire victims. Yet, according to what the research participants told us, the municipality’s help was late and insufficient (as further addressed in the analysis section). The following subsection examines some of the self-identified challenges and learnings experienced by informal settlement dwellers after the fire. As addressed throughout this work, one of the expected aims of this research is to examine the subalterns’ needs and ways of organising and present their critical understandings and potential solutions to the challenges they face. In that sense, listening to the voices of the most marginalised living in informality and reflecting on their own experiences is believed to be a step forward and a contribution from this research for MOS.

*8.1.2 Magangeni informal settlement as a space of deprivation and vulnerability*

Research participants identified and framed the main challenges they face in Magangeni when there is a fire. The first issue they raised was related to building materials. *“In Magangeni, we build our shacks with the cheapest building material we can find, mainly plastic and wood. And while we know they can both burn very fast, we don’t have many alternatives as all other building materials are more expensive or harder to get” (Eddie, Focus group, February 2020). “Besides, we don’t count with fire extinguishers, meaning we are not armed or prepared to fight the fire while we wait for the firefighters to come” (Louis, Focus group, February 2020).*

A second challenge identified by the research participants relates to the lack of access to basic services and their consequent illegal connections. Because of the difficulties accessing water, dwellers experience low water pressure issues when filling their buckets to fight the fire. *“Taking water from the communal standpipe, with all standpipes open at the same time, won’t help because the water pressure goes down. As we are illegally connected to water, the pressure is very low when we are all using the standpipes” (Lucy, Focus group, February 2020).* In that sense, the lack of fire hydrants around the area is a big issue for informal settlement dwellers. For Nikiwe, the answer should come from the municipality. “*The municipality should install fire hydrants and hose pipes in selected houses. Maybe two fire hydrants in each of the four sectors of our informal settlement might work” (Interview, November 2020).*

Besides, according to the research participants, there is a great danger associated with illegal electricity connections in the settlement. Three of the four sections of Magangeni do not have legal access to electricity. In November 2019, a damaged wire contacted a tree and started a fire. Nikiwe remembers, *“That wire then impacted a 5-year-old child who was playing nearby, causing his death” (Interview, November 2020).* For Lucy, the more vulnerable groups among the subalterns are more exposed to these accidents caused by illegal connections to electricity. In her words, “*It is the most innocent groups who end up paying the consequences of our actions. We cannot afford access to electricity, so we connect illegally. We do it for our families to cook food and have electricity for our kids to do their homework at night-time. But we also know that playing out there can be dangerous for them… as it happened to that 5-year-old kid” (Focus group, February 2020).* The same as children,the elderly have been another vulnerable group exposed to the dangers of a fire. According to Eddie, *“Fire produced by illegal connections to electricity also affects the elderly who cannot run to save themselves. A few years ago, due to another fire incident caused by damaged wires, we had to help an old man neighbour leave the shack. If it weren’t for our help, he would have died inside” (Focus group, February 2021).* For Louis, the way forward is clear, and the answer should also come from the municipality. *“It is the municipality who should provide us legal electricity connections to reduce fire incidents so that we could feel safer. At this point, we all know that illegal electricity connections are killing us” (Focus group, February 2021).*

Another challenge identified by research participants regarding fire relates to overcrowding. As described in the focus group, the informal settlement footpaths are very narrow, and there is not much space between shacks. This would cause the fire to spread fast. As Lucy describes, “*When one shack burns, it is very easy for other shacks to burn too. The fire moves with devastating speed. When the fire spreads through our informal settlement, it can easily destroy twenty shacks in five minutes” (Focus group, February 2021).* Consequently, for Eddie, the challenge is to get to a safe area using those narrow pathways. *“Imagine having only one way to get out of your house, one footpath, to get to a safe area. It just takes someone out of their mind to leave something on the way where people are supposed to pass, to create a big problem that could easily end with several deaths” (Eddie, Focus group, February 2020).*

Finally, the research participants identified the lack of security as another big challenge they are exposed to when a fire occurs. According to them, it seems to be common for dwellers to steal belongings from the shacks being burnt. The issue of security was raised in the focus group. For Lydia, *“Here in the settlement, there are thieves who are waiting for an occasion like this* (a fire) *to break in your house and steal your belongings. I cannot understand why people would do this… but the fact is they do” (Focus group, February 2021).* In the same vein, Mary added that in Magangeni, *“We know there are people who are not there to help but to steal things from the shacks that are burning” (Focus group, February 2020).* Lucy, in turn, affirms that after several similar episodes, she has learnt that she needs to have her belongings ready to take them with her when the fire starts. *“Stealing occurs each time there is a fire in our settlement. I learnt that you need to take all your belongings out of your house. If not, someone else will come and rob you” (Focus group, February 2020).* The explanation for these robberies, for Nikiwe, would come from the loss of jobs to which dwellers were exposed amidst the pandemic (see Chapter VII). *“As many people lost their jobs during the pandemic… they are looking for something to bring to their tables so that they can help themselves and their families. This something could be clothes, money, or sometimes food only. There have been cases where people break into a house, get something to eat and then leave. Others have got food and then sell it to get some pocket money… And I don’t excuse them, but you need to understand these are difficult times” (Interview, November 2020).*

Yet, after suffering several fire incidents, the informal settlement dwellers have self-identified several solutions. Lydia refers to the lack of security above mentioned. She recommends *“that people should not leave important things at home, such as money, identity documents, or certificates… because in places like ours, a fire could start at any moment” (Focus group, February 2021).* In terms of strategies to stop the fire, Eddie suggests this should be done by attacking the roots of the flames. For him, *“When we are fighting the fire, we learnt we must extinguish it from the roots. If you pour the water in the middle of the fire, the fire won’t stop. It will keep on burning. But if you start from the roots, it will stop. We know the fire extinguishers won’t arrive in five minutes, so we need to act quickly and wisely… at least until they arrive*” *(Focus group, February 2021)*. At the same time, other dwellers propose neighbours should start by changing their own behaviours. For Mary, *“Taverns should close earlier in our informal settlement. This way, we would avoid having so many drunken people at night-time, reducing the chances of incidents like the one in October” (Focus group, February 2021).*

In the same vein, Nikiwe suggests they should all learn to live together and respect each other within the settlement. *“We understand we face several challenges, but we always try our best and tell our neighbours that we are one big family staying in the same place. If we stay in the shacks, we have to know our neighbours, socialise with them, and adapt to living together, even if they are not coming from the same area where I come. We all come from different places to live here. There are Malawians, Zimbabweans, and from different countries in Africa. But together, we should stand. If we are not together and respect each other, then everything will be even harder for all of us” (Interview, November 2020).*

This sub-section described some of the self-identified challenges experienced by informal settlement dwellers after the fire outbreak. These challenges included poor structural quality of housing, lack of access to essential services (and their consequent illegal connections), overcrowding, and lack of security (see Table 8A at the beginning of this chapter). Reflecting on learnings and possible solutions, the research participants recommended practical solutions to deal with security issues, technical solutions to control the fire before the firefighters arrive, and changes in their own behaviour regarding living together as a community (as further addressed in the Analysis section). The following section discusses the power dynamics and the dwellers’ organising during and after the fire outbreak. First, it uses the power cube framework to analyse the power dynamics affecting Magangeni informal settlement after the accidental fire of October 2020. In so doing, it reflects on the ways each of the cube’s dimensions can interact with each other to open or close possibilities for change. Then, it reflects on subalternity and urban informality as a site of critical analysis to understand the informal settlement risk conditions and the search of the subalterns for sustainable solutions to overcome them.

**8.2 Analysis**

***8.2.1 Power dynamics during and after the fire***

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Self-identified challenge** | **Forms of power**  | **Levels of power** | **Spaces of power** | **Actors involved** |
| Organising stakeholders help | Visible | Neighbourhood (within Magangeni informal settlement) | Invited | Informal settlement committee/ Informal settlement dwellers/ Municipality/ NGOs/ CSOs |
| Magangeni informal settlement as a space of deprivation and vulnerability | Invisible | Neighbourhood (within Magangeni informal settlement) | Claimed | Informal settlement dwellers |

Following Gaventa (2006) the self-identified challenges need to be understood through the dimension of the power cube framework. It is important to note that while the dimensions can be analysed separately, in practice, they are ‘nested’ within each other. As Gaventa (2006) explains, “Visible power contains within it the norms and beliefs of invisible power; the boundaries and possibilities of invited spaces are shaped by the other spaces which surround them, global levels of power are experienced locally, and so forth” (Gaventa, 2021, p.124). In that sense, Gaventa suggests that each of the cube’s dimensions will also interact with each other to open or close possibilities for change. This notion of opening and closing possibilities for change is relevant to this analysis of the self-identified challenges following the fire and the possibilities for change. Strategies for challenging closed spaces of participation might include claiming autonomous spaces. Gaventa (2021) proposes that engaging with visible forms of power might help challenge hidden or invisible forms. Similarly, every space of power may itself be affected by the forms of power within it. Due to this complexity working across all the spaces, forms, and levels of power can present a challenge. Gaventa (2021) suggests building alliances and coalitions to work across these dimensions, recognising that such partnerships can present power divisions and conflicts too. Consequently, this is an important aspect for the analysis of the dwellers’ organising following the fire to ensure the roles of the dwellers and the different stakeholders and intermediaries who became involved because of the fire.

Within Magangeni, the informal settlement committee exerts the most visible form of power. When it comes to organising after an emergency, the informal settlement committee is recognised as a valid voice by both the municipal authorities and the dwellers; hence they work together. Following the fire, the informal settlement committee asked the people living close to the burned dwellings to stay away from when the firefighters arrived, and it was to the informal settlement committee that the dwellers reported the names of the fire victims. The committee chairperson also agreed with the councillor on the best place to install the tent for the victims. The informal settlement committee oversaw an open meeting to inform the community about the tent and convinced those dwellers who were sceptic that staying in the tent was the best solution for them. The committee also created a list of all the households that had lost their shacks to coordinate the help they were offered by different stakeholders. Through a simple system of signing their names on a list, the committee made sure that the food parcels and clothes were distributed fairly among the people affected by the fire. In the event of complaints, the informal settlement committee explained to the dwellers how the help was being received, the time it took, and how they distributed the aid to different households. The informal settlement committee also coordinated the help provided by NGOs and civil society organisations. Recognised as a valid actor by organisations of the third sector, the informal settlement committee helped distribute the foodstuff and warm clothing they received after the fire.

Yet the help provided by the municipality and civil society organisations was offered without prior consultation with the wider Magangeni settlement. After the fire incident, the municipality and CSOs assumed that foodstuff and warm clothing would be their top priorities. But for the research participants, these temporary solutions should be replaced by other solutions that might help them live in safer conditions in the longer term. Magangeni informal settlement dwellers have experienced the dangers and consequences of connecting illegally to electricity. The research participants described how they tried to create partnerships and alliances with NGOs and civil society organisations. Still, they feel that the ultimate responsibility is taken by the Municipality. According to the dwellers, the municipality should provide the informal settlement with legal electricity connections to help prevent fire incidents. The dwellers also highlighted the need for better access to water and the relevance of having fire hydrants closer to the settlement. They believe these measures can help them save time, shacks, and eventually, lives.

For Magangeni dwellers, if the local government has the political and visible power to set rules and norms, they should offer solutions to improve the living standards of the subaltern. Arguably, these might also help to achieve sustainable outcomes. Here, what is at stake is how sustainability is understood by the different actors involved, such as the dwellers, the municipality, and the CSOs. As described in the literature review, Boyer et al. (2016) address the importance of ‘place-based, process-oriented perspectives’ that understand environmental, economic, and social sustainability as integrated concepts intersecting in the practices and perspectives of individuals. According to the scholars, place-based and process-oriented sustainability efforts could encourage local ownership of ideas and engage the subalterns in decision-making. This could also help recognise diverse non-academic perspectives about local environments to challenge the dominant technocratic discourse of sustainability identified in mainstream literature. In that sense, understanding sustainability from a fully integrated, process-oriented, and place-based approach could eventually help Magangeni add new and alternative perspectives to preventing fire incidents and promoting sustainable development debates. As examined in Chapter V, mainstream MOS literature has arguably suppressed and derogated the narratives of the oppressed and marginalised, their knowledge, and how they live and organise (Imas and Weston, 2012). In that sense, listening to the voices of the most marginalised living in informality in Magangeni- critically addressing their challenges and reflecting on learnings and possible solutions- is believed to be a step forward and a contribution from this research to the MOS literature.

However, Magangeni organising during and after the fire did not present only visible forms of power. In theory, selling alcohol in South Africa was prohibited because of the lockdown measures. Yet, leading up to the fire people were fighting in a tavern that was still operating in the settlement. According to the research participants, when the three fatal victims were fighting at the tavern, the tavern customers (and dwellers’ neighbours) decided to send them home. As the three people were drunk and wanted to fight, the other customers asked them to leave. However, the three people returned to the tavern, and in response, the people in the tavern chased them away, followed them to their shack, and locked them into the shack making sure they could not get out this time. In Gaventa’s power cube framework (2006), all these actions would represent invisible forms of power, namely, the form of power that shapes meanings and defines what should be considered ‘normal’ or acceptable. The dwellers, wanting to enjoy their time at the tavern, thought the three drunken customers were not allowing them to do so. Hence, they agreed to take action and send the people home and lock them into their shack. For the tavern customers, these actions and communal decision-making were considered something ‘normal’.

This informal way of organising through invisible power was also experienced after the fire. Without seeking permission from the informal settlement committee, several dwellers started cleaning their sites, making a place to build their new shacks. They would not wait for the municipality or the informal settlement committee to deliver them temporary solutions. Building new houses in the same place as the houses destroyed by the fire was not only an act of resistance but considered acceptable by the people taking the action. It is what they had done after other emergencies, and it is what they would probably do if they lost their houses again. For Gaventa (2021), even in extreme inequality of power, dominated groups have found ways to exert their agency, challenging power relations. As examined in Chapter V, Mottiar (2009) suggests building a new shack after theirs is demolished represents an effort of the subaltern to contest the meaning of order and control of public space. Based on an ability to persist, shack dwellers would first ‘illegally’ occupy a piece of land and then refuse to leave the place. If their houses are demolished after an eviction or destroyed after a natural disaster, they will build another one. And if the local government denies them the provision of services, they will illegally connect to electricity and water facilities. According to Mottiar (2009), these actions are not only an issue of survival but acts of resistance that could eventually transform power relations towards the interests of the subalterns. Interestingly another group of dwellers did not start building their shacks after the fire because they did not have the building materials needed to do so and stayed living in the tent provided by the municipality. However, after several months of waiting for the building materials to arrive that the municipality had promised them, they left the tent. Tired of living in a temporary place, they asked their relatives and friends if they could receive them in their shacks. On these occasions, it was not the power of the informal settlement committee but the agency of the dwellers and their skills for survival that guided their actions. They did not feel safe living in the tent and had lost their patience waiting for the municipality’s help to arrive,

This section has discussed how visible and invisible forms of power and invited and claimed spaces of power co-exist for the subalterns organising Magangeni after the fire. The informal settlement formally organises through its committee, which is legitimised by its dwellers and recognised by external stakeholders when coordinating help after an emergency. This help, in turn, comes in the form of temporary solutions but without addressing the root causes of the problems identified by the research participants. Arguably, the provision of an emergency tent, food, water cans and building materials the municipality offered after the fire did not address the causes of poverty and inequality that explain the existence of Magangeni. Heavy rains would not be an issue if Magangeni were not built on a flood plain. Fires would not be that common if the dwellers had access to legal electricity connections; the place was not overcrowded and had better building materials. Consequently, this section discussed how the dwellers’ self-organising could eventually overcome the rules, structures, and decision-making procedures assigned to the informal settlement committee or the municipality by for example, dealing with the people who caused the fire accident and their reaction to the municipality’s late help. These forms of informal organising demonstrate the various and different decisions that the subalterns can take when facing an emergency.

The following section further discusses the organising of the subalterns after the fire outbreak. The section is divided into four different but interrelated parts. The first part recalls the discussion of difference and subalternity in Magangeni, highlighting NGOs’ role as a significant help after the fire. The second part examines the notion of vulnerability and the possible ways for informal settlement dwellers to reduce their levels of vulnerability and cope with fire outbreaks in Magangeni. The third part discusses how dwellers organised themselves in the fire’s aftermath, arguably exemplifying what has been considered a critical feature of South African subalterns’ organisation since the return of democracy, namely, focusing on securing narrow improvements within local residential areas instead of seeking large-scale transformations. A fourth and last subsection reflects how the debates above-described help address this thesis's research question and main aims.

***8.2.2 The subalterns and the fire***

*8.2.2.1 Difference and subalternity in Magangeni: The role of NGOs after the fire*

After the devastating fire of October 2020, the councillor and other municipal officers delivered groceries, mattresses, and blankets in Magangeni. The municipality also installed a big tent in the informal settlement where the fire victims could stay. However, according to the research participants, the municipality is always late no matter the help they need. Arguably, despite the help provided, there would be a lack of trust from the dwellers to the councillor and a lack of interest from the councillor to the dwellers. In February 2021, an important number of dwellers were still waiting for building materials that the councillor had offered them after the October fire. The findings sections showed how research participants criticised not only that the help was always late but also that it did not cover all the victims' needs. Especially regarding building materials, many people were left behind without receiving any help. One of the informal settlement committee members explained that the number of materials the municipality offers hardly matches the number of victims after a fire. And while some dwellers will eventually receive their building materials, the help will never come for others. The latter is the case for immigrants who cannot receive any help from the municipality because of not having identity documents. And this applies not only for fires or flood emergencies but for any social grant they are not allowed to obtain. As ‘not regularised’ immigrants, they form an integral part of the South African informal economy but exist only on the nation’s political and social life margins.

Chapter VI presented how undocumented migrants faced a new level of subjugation amidst the pandemic. Not being able to access the government’s help amidst the pandemic, nor to go back to their countries due to lack of economic resources, the undocumented migrants were dependent on the help of civil society organisations. The same happened after the fire in October 2020. The undocumented immigrants living in the informal settlement did not have the same rights that their South African neighbours. As amidst the pandemic, after the fire, it was arguably in the attribution of difference that the logic of dominance and subordination would have had expression. Different as an undocumented immigrant. In the words of Pandey (2006), difference as subalternity. Subalternity as difference.

Conversely, the help received from the municipality, NGOs, individual donors, and other civil society organisations helping Magangeni after the fire did not discriminate whether the victims had their IDs or where they came from. They brought food and clothes to the settlement and asked the informal settlement committee to distribute them to the fire victims. The help that these stakeholders were offering was valuable first because it covered some of the basic needs of the victims, namely foodstuff and warm clothing. Second, it respected and recognised the informal settlement internal ability to organise through its informal settlement committee. And third, by working together with the informal settlement committee and municipality ensured that all the victims, including immigrants with no regular documentation, received the immediate help being offered.

As discussed in Chapter III, the role and responsibilities of NGOs have been largely addressed in international development literature. NGOs have been criticised for focusing on service-delivery and taking distance from low-income people, holding accountability more to their donors than to the community (Banks and Hulme, 2012). Since the late 1980s, NGOs were also defined as advocates of modernisation, development, and 'good governance' by Northern donors; and as critical allies by the states, because of their impact on employment and service provision (Howell and Pearce, 2001; Banks, et. al 2015). However, describing all NGOs as part of a system of containment is a simplification that should be resisted (Pithouse, 2013). This research understands NGOs as dynamic organisations with complex and different forms of organising to respond to the specific contexts in which they exist. In that sense, while NGOs were criticised after speaking on behalf of the subaltern amidst the pandemic (see Chapter VII), they also played a crucial role in helping the more marginalised groups of Magangeni informal settlement after the fire.

After the fire, NGOs and other civil society actors made sure that the help arrived for all the victims who most needed it, having personal documentation or not. They discarded the differentiation between legal and illegal, or the authorised and the unauthorised, all visible forms of power through with the South African government had discriminated the subalterns (see Chapter V). In this case, they understood that the informality of irregular documentation was not an impediment to include the most marginalised of the subaltern as beneficiaries of their help. NGOs’ help was also a matter of inclusion and social justice to a certain extent. While NGOs help in Magangeni after the fire did not challenge the causes of the subaltern deprivation and marginalisation, it included them and recognised them as part of the fire victims who required help. In so doing, NGOs in Magangeni challenged the rules of the South African government (written at a national level under arguably closed spaces of participation) by providing help to ‘not regularised’ immigrants (at the neighbourhood level) who, by law, were not expected to receive any help after the fire (a visible form of power). The following subsection discusses how deprivation and vulnerability in Magangeni are exposed after a fire outbreak, reflecting on the South African government’s approach to disaster management and the ways for informal settlement dwellers to organise and manage the risk of fire.

*8.2.2.2 Organising to reduce fire and vulnerability in Magangeni*

As examined in previous chapters, the literature shows informal settlements to exist at the margins of an unequal society. They are more exposed to risks because of their conditions and the land they use. In that sense, they are, by nature, associated with considerable loss, shock, and human suffering (Ngau and Boit, 2020). In other words, they tend to be exposed to higher levels of vulnerability than other populations. Vulnerability in this context can be understood as an aggregate measure of human welfare that integrates environmental, social, economic, and political exposure of individuals or groups of people who are especially sensitive to a range of potentially harmful hazards and perturbations (Seeliger and Turok, 2014, Usamah et al., 2014). In Magangeni, shacks are usually built adjacent to one another in a geographically sensitive area, where there is a lack of adequate sanitation facilities, dwellers lack safety and security, and most of them have not been able to secure a job. And while Langutani Municipality has provided Magangeni access to communal ablution blocks, communal tap points, and formal electricity in one of the four sections of the settlement, research participants agree that help is far from enough for the more than 550 households living in the settlement. As explained in Chapter VII, this situation worsened after the pandemic, with a vast majority of the dwellers losing their (informal) jobs and overcrowding the settlement (even more). As Seeliger and Turok (2014, p.190) describe, this overcrowding increases the chances of a fire spreading: “The dense settlement pattern and lack of space between the shacks increase the chances of a fire spreading. The paucity of internal roads and their poor condition also complicate access for emergency vehicles, especially in winter when the steep unsurfaced roads are wet… [Additionally], high levels of violent crime make people fearful of accessing communal water and sanitation facilities at night”. As described by the research participants in the findings section, Magangeni dwellers have been exposed to these challenges -overcrowding, safety and security, lack of basic services-and more.

While there is no single standard definition of an informal settlement across South African data sources, definitions are likely to incorporate references to the ‘illegal’ status of the land; the substandard building materials of the dwelling; the lack of access to basic services; and the difficulties of proclaiming a ‘formal’ demarcation of the place (HDA, 2013; Dupont et al., 2016)*.* According to the 2009 National Housing Code’s Informal Settlement Upgrading Programme, informal settlements are identified based on the following characteristics: illegality and informality; inappropriate locations; restricted public and private sector investment; and poverty and vulnerability (HDA, 2013). Similarly, UN-Habitat defines informal settlements as residential areas where inhabitants often have no security or tenure for the land or dwellings they inhabit; neighbourhoods usually lack basic services; housing may not comply with planning and building regulations and is often situated in geographically and environmentally sensitive areas (UN-Habitat, 2015). Magangeni has all the characteristics above mentioned. Dwellers live in a flood plain next to a river, putting their shacks and lives at permanent risk. When Langutani experiences heavy rains, the dwellers know they are exposed to losing their houses and will eventually need to look for temporary shelter. Something similar is likely to happen after a fire or an eviction.

South Africa developed a Disaster Management Act in 2002 and a Disaster Management Framework in 2004 for responding to disasters in the country, including fire outbreaks. Yet, this apparent good legislation has not necessarily translated into good practice. Both the Act and the Framework have been criticised because of the lack of clear guidance to local municipalities, the inadequate funding, and the insufficient overall capacities for disaster risk reduction (Van Niekerk, 2014). In 2019 alone, 5544 informal settlements fire were reported in South Africa, and almost half of them could not determine the fire cause (Flores Quiroz and Cicione, 2021). In fact, between 2005 and 2019, approximately 40% of the fire causes were classified as ‘undetermined’ in the country (ibid.). Some of the factors that would contribute to this lack of clarity are the lack of evidence left after the fire scene, the limited time and resources available to the fire department to conduct a fire investigation, and the limited information that is documented after a fire (e.g., cause of ignition, human factors and equipment contributing to the ignition, or dwellers’ feedback) (Cicione et al., 2019). The causes that contribute to residential fires in informal settlements include, but are not limited to, domestic violence, alcohol abuse, children left home alone, the use of candles, faulty electrical connections, and the improper use of electric appliances (UNDP, 2009; Cicione et al., 2019). While it could not be confirmed, Magangeni dwellers believe the improper use of electric appliances, namely the cooking stove, caused the fire in October 2020.

Yet there appears to be more clarity when explaining the factors influencing the fire spread rates in informal settlements. For Ngau and Boit (2020), the rapid spread of fire in informal settlements is conditioned by the high density of settlement structures, coupled with the combustibility of construction materials (mainly corrugated iron, advertising boards, plastic, and wood), and the lack of water supply. According to the scholars, even where some assistance is provided, firefighters are usually late, and when they arrive, the fire has already consumed multiple structures. The finding section described how, while several Magangeni dwellers had knowledge and awareness of how to deal with a fire, the lack of fire hydrants and access to water, and the time they had to wait for the firefighters to arrive made it almost impossible to stop the fire or avoid the loss of their houses.

A way forward for informal settlements to reduce their levels of vulnerability and cope with a fire outbreak would be to strengthen social relationships and act as a group linked by their shared vulnerability. According to Usamah et al. (2014), informal settlements that exhibit signs of vulnerability are associated with poverty and high exposure to fire damage or other hazards, but at the same time have strong social cohesion, and internal networks could counterbalance their levels of vulnerability. This cohesion, manifested in a strong sense of community, trust among the community members, and respect for authority, could act as a strong resource in times of disaster. In the same vein, Ngau and Boit (2020) suggest informal settlement dwellers as a group are linked by their shared vulnerability. For the scholars, informal settlement dwellers as a group share physical threats and risks to their shelter and wellbeing, and many are vulnerable to the daily threat of fire. Yet, linked by their shared vulnerability, they would be capable of self-organising and effectively acting and overcoming a fire disaster.

As emerged from the data, the heterogeneity of the subalterns is a key characteristic in Magangeni. Differences between dwellers and their relationships within the community are affected by gender, kinship, and residence status (e.g., undocumented immigrants). However, acting as a group -linked by their shared vulnerability and strengthening their social relationships- arguably helped them overcome their immediate challenges after the fire. Magangeni informal settlement committee organised the help so that all the fire victims, including those marginalised by the municipality, could access the help offered by different stakeholders. Recognised as a valid actor both by the donors and the dwellers, the informal settlement committee exerted its visible form of power to distribute the help among the fire victims equally. When lining up and signing to receive the help, the dwellers trusted how the help was being organised, followed the rules and procedures, and solidarized with those most in need. As discussed in Chapter VI, while Magangeni dwellers highlight the difference and diversity that exists among subalterns in the informal settlement, at the same time, they can work as a homogenous group uniting in “strategic essentialism” to achieve specific outcomes, such as access to essential needs after the fire (Spivak, 1988).

This subsection has discussed the deprivation and vulnerability of Magangeni subalterns living in the informal settlement. It has reflected on the South African government’s approach to disaster management and the possible ways for informal settlement dwellers to reduce their levels of vulnerability and cope with fire outbreaks. The following subsection addresses how the subalterns organising in Magangeni have focused on localised struggles and narrow improvements instead of large-scale transformation. In so doing, it reflects on the historical legacy of apartheid and the role of the ANC after the return of democracy.

*8.2.2.3 Subalterns organising: Focusing on localised struggles instead of large-scale transformation*

The ways through which dwellers organised themselves in the fire’s aftermath is arguably an example of what Paret (2018) has considered to be a critical feature of South African subalterns’ organisation since the return of democracy, namely, focusing on securing narrow improvements within local residential areas instead of seeking large-scale transformations. As described by the research participants, they want to have a safe place to live and better access to essential services. In that sense, their major concerns after the fire were asking the municipality to provide legal electricity connections and having fire hydrants closer to the settlement to help prevent fire incidents. Their organising did not include other informal settlements at a national or a ward level. It did not include claims for formal housing, relocation, or against a neoliberal system that had perpetuated their marginalisation of society. Their organising after the fire was about securing access to basic services, clothes, food, and blankets. Arguably, this would have its origin in the historical legacy of apartheid and the role of the ANC after the return to democracy.

For Gibson (2007), the politics of spatial segregation that controlled the movement of black people in cities during the apartheid, coupled with the challenge for the state to provide public services and basic infrastructure after democracy, would have constrained the possibilities of the subalterns of improving their living conditions, also affecting their ability to settle permanently in urban areas. As explained by Williams et al. (2019, p.170), the politics of segregation of the subalterns resulted in South Africa becoming one of the most unequal societies in the world, “not only in terms of income and wealth, but also in relation to the spatial distribution of, and access to, resources”. The particularities of the South African political history have also conditioned ‘the local’ -and not the national level- to be the critical terrain of resistance for informal settlement dwellers (Kovacic et al., 2019).

With the return to democracy in 1994, the ANC assumed power with significant legitimacy; promising democracy would bring concrete material improvements to the country. According to Paret (2018, p.348), the party promised: “to redress the racialised disadvantages solidified by apartheid, and thus to secure ‘a better life’ the ANC’s popular campaign slogan- for the black majority”. For the scholar, this significant popular support made South Africans refer to the post-apartheid state as ‘our government’. As described in Chapter III, the ANC provided more than 4 million housing subsidies within the first two decades of democracy (Braathen et al. 2014; Meth, 2020). Besides, by 2014, the government provided cash transfers (mainly Child Support Grants to impoverished families) to nearly one-third of the entire South African population (Paret, 2018). Arguably, these measures, together with the ANC’s historical legacy of popular resistance during apartheid, might have reinforced the perception of the subalterns of a sympathetic state -considered to be a legitimate caretaker of their basic needs-. In that sense, while Magangeni research participants mentioned party politics was not an issue in the informal settlement and that nobody asked their neighbours which political party they identified with, it is a fact that most of the research participants sympathised with the ANC.

Likewise, the resistance of the urban subalterns in South Africa would have arguably been ‘highly localised´ and mainly about service delivery during the last couple of decades. For Paret (2018, p.338), “Rather than massive gatherings in city centres, [subalterns’ resistance] took the form of smaller and disconnected local protests… [These local protests] did not push for broad political and economic transformation... In contrast, protests in South Africa pursued narrow demands around local development and public service delivery”. For the scholar, the strategies of the urban dispossessed would have confined their protests to the local level and focused primarily on immediate needs. In the same vein, Bayat (2013) explains informal settlement dwellers would necessarily have to focus on ‘localised struggles’ because “they must emphasise strategies, organisations, and associations that respond directly to their immediate concerns” (p.201). Therefore, for Bayat, local protests would be more ‘manageable’ for the subalterns (than broad transformative struggles) because they (the subalterns) determine their aims and control the expected outcomes. According to the research participants, the immediate needs after a fire outbreak would be closely related to the challenging conditions of deprivation and vulnerability they experience in the informal settlement. As previously described in the findings, the dwellers would face challenges due to the poor structural quality and the combustibility of the construction materials of their shacks (mainly corrugated iron, advertising boards, plastic, and wood), the overcrowding (affecting their narrow pathways in the settlement), the lack of safety and security, and the lack of access to basic services (illegally connecting to water and electricity as previously examined). Consequently, their protests and demands would be directed to address those specific challenges and needs.

*8.2.2.4 Summary*

This second part of the analysis section recalled Chapter’s VI discussion on heterogeneity and subalternity. While Chapter VI focused on women as a doubly subjugated group, this chapter examined the case of undocumented immigrants and their struggle to receive help from the municipality after the fire due to their ‘irregular’ condition. Not being able to access the government’s help amidst the pandemic, nor to go back to their countries due to lack of economic resources, the undocumented migrants were dependent on the help of civil society organisations. The undocumented immigrants living in the informal settlement did not have the same rights that their South African neighbours. As amidst the pandemic, after the fire, it was arguably in the attribution of difference that the logic of dominance and subordination would have had expression. Different as poor, different as black, and different as an undocumented immigrant. This section also discussed the vulnerability of Magangeni subalterns living in the informal settlement, reflecting on the South African government’s approach to disaster management and the possible ways subalterns had to cope with fire outbreaks. In that sense, it was analysed how the ways dwellers organised themselves in the fire’s aftermath arguably followed a critical feature of South African subalterns’ organisation since the return of democracy, namely, focusing on securing narrow improvements within local residential areas instead of seeking large-scale transformations.

Chapters V to VIII focused on Magangeni participants’ voices, aiming to unfold how they made sense of their environment, which challenges they identified, and how they coped with them collectively. The main aim was to contribute to new conceptual and empirical knowledge on the relationship between power dynamics, subaltern organisational practices, and social change. Likewise, the second part of this chapter aimed to explore the complexities of the subalterns organising in Magangeni during and after a fire outbreak, addressing how their multiple and heterogeneous identities, overlapping positions, and shifting alliances went beyond fixed and mutually exclusive categories discussed in mainstream MOS. The subalterns’ heterogeneity and different subjugations above described would, in turn, condition the complexities of understanding organising and resistance in Magangeni informal settlement. In that sense, depending on the situation and the context, Magangeni dwellers could organise through separate groups to address different challenges (see chapter VI on gender and organising), or as one homogeneous group (what Spivak called “strategic essentialism”) to claim access to basic needs after the fire outbreak. Likewise, by discussing the notion of vulnerability in Magangeni informal settlement and reflecting on the historical legacy of apartheid and the role of the ANC after the return of democracy, this section aimed to address the organising of the subalterns as part of a broader debate on social justice and participation, challenging mainstream technocratic discourses, and highlighting the relevance of the political, economic, and social context in analysing subalternity and organising.

The following chapter presents the conclusions of this thesis. In so doing, it addresses the three research aims to then answer its main research question. Consequently, it identifies the main contributions this research aims to add to the existing literature. Finally, the chapter reflects on the limitations and tensions of conducting critical participatory action research in Magangeni informal settlement.

**Chapter IX: Conclusions**

This research has explored the extent to which, and how, power dynamics can affect the organising of the subalterns in the Magangeni informal settlement, South Africa. Informed by a relativist ontology and a social constructionist epistemology, the research took an interpretivist approach. Likewise, this investigation was based on qualitative research, to inform the descriptions of the context and processes involved, and the different understandings of research participants. Through a participatory methodological approach, the key objective of this work was to offer a deeper understanding of informal organising and suggest how mainstream knowledge might be reconceptualised. In this chapter, I first discuss how the findings address the aims of this research and its research question. Consequently, I discuss the methodological, empirical, theoretical, and conceptual contributions of this work. Finally, I reflect on the limitations and tensions of conducting critical participatory action research in Magangeni informal settlement amidst the Covid-19 pandemic.

**9.1 Addressing the research aims and the Research Question**

As set out in the Methodology chapter, the research process was guided to address a research question and three specific aims. In this section, I begin by addressing the three specific aims, which then makes it possible to offer an answer to the main research question: To what extent and how do power dynamics affect the organising of the subalterns in Magangeni informal settlement in South Africa?

***9.1.1 Specific Aim 1: To identify the levels, spaces, and forms of power within the informal settlement, examining to what extent these can alter or perpetuate the factors of subjugation the subaltern face.***

To inform my analysis and reflect on the power dynamics operating in the Magangeni informal settlement, I used Gaventa’s ‘power cube’ as a framework. I drew on this framework to examine three different, but interrelated dimensions of power: levels of power, spaces of power, and forms of power, which constantly redefine and affect each other. For ease of analysis, in this work, I examined each dimension separately. However, throughout this analysis, the links and relationships between them were highlighted and discussed. In this research first used the power cube framework as a method for context analysis, to address the informal settlement settings and conditions (Chapter IV). The power cube framework was then complemented with a stakeholder’s mapping and the power/interest grid as relevant tools to analyse organising strategies and action in Magangeni (Chapters V, VI, and VII). The findings suggest the combination of policies and strategies at different levels, spaces, and forms of power can perpetuate the subjugation the subalterns face in Magangeni.

Using the power cube framework as a context analysis method, Chapter V identified and examined the different stakeholders affecting Magangeni power dynamics, its multiple alliances, and the extent to which these could alter or perpetuate the factors of subjugation subalterns face. The findings suggest that if the subalterns of Magangeni intend to challenge the relations that cause their subordination, they might need to build multiple strategies linked to aligning all three dimensions of power, understanding its nuances and complexities. Just as those who study the Rubik’s cube argue there are billions of different positions that the blocks of the cube may have. Analysing power dynamics using Gaventa’s power cube framework, helped to identify and explain the variations and complexities in the dimensions of power in Magangeni informal settlement. Accordingly, the chapter concluded that power dimensions in Magangeni are interrelated and dynamic, therefore constantly changing and depending on the context and situation in which they are analysed.

Consequently, while this research focused mainly on the municipality and the neighbourhood levels, the national level of power also affected Magangeni informal settlement. As previously described, all three levels are interrelated and cannot be understood without the other. In that sense, Chapter V identified the national, municipal, and neighbourhood levels of power as the three main levels of Magangeni engagement in the public sphere. Chapter VI, in turn, added the household level as the fourth level of analysis to examine gender-based violence and organising in the settlement.

*Levels of power*

The first dimension of Gaventa’s ‘power cube’ framework is related to the levels where social, political, and economic power resides. According to Gaventa (2006), this dimension contains the contest between global, national, and local arenas as locations of power. Consequently, local forms of power would be shaped in relationship to global forces and, at the same time, can affect them. For Gaventa (ibid.), the key is to understand these dynamics as an adaptable continuum, not fixed dimensions. The importance of levels of engagement would vary according to the context, purpose, and challenges of different organisations and individuals. Breaking down the levels of power in categories of contextual relevance might also help grasp the relationality of power, as an individual might be powerful in one setting and powerless in another (Pantazidou, 2012). In the previous chapters, four different levels of power were analysed, looking specifically at national, municipal, neighbourhood, and household levels of power.

At the national level, this work addressed the housing laws and policies implemented by the Government in post-Apartheid South Africa. In this manner, it described how the Government had to shift its approach from denigrating informality to considering the upgrading of informal settlements as a valid pathway to address the housing backlog in the country. The macroeconomic policy of Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) adopted by the Government in 1994, perpetuated a process of economic reform started decades before by the apartheid government. This macroeconomic strategy included trade liberalisation and the privatisation of basic services, such as water and electricity, having appalling results for the subalterns. Especially among the marginalised in the urban context found it challenging to live and work within the market discipline, contracts, and bureaucratic rationale, seeking alternative or ‘informal’ institutions and relations in production, trade, and housing. In the same vein, Smit (2020) concludes informal settlement dwellers are particularly vulnerable to economic shocks such as lockdown restrictions, as most of them have precarious short-term sources of income from informal trade or casual work. As examined in Chapter VII, Magangeni dwellers could hardly generate extra cash for use during the pandemic lockdown. Moreover, households in Magangeni informal settlement not only could not store food for several days, but they sourced most of their food from informal markets and street vendors that were closed during the lockdown restrictions. Chapter VIII, in turn, examined how the subalterns of Magangeni informal settlement are more exposed to risks because of their conditions and the land they use. In Magangeni, shacks are usually built adjacent to one another in a geographically sensitive area, where there is a lack of adequate sanitation facilities, dwellers lack safety and security, and most of them have not been able to secure a job. This situation worsened after the pandemic, with a vast majority of the dwellers losing their (informal) jobs and overcrowding the settlement (even more). Consequently, the dense settlement pattern and lack of space between the shacks increased the chances of a fire spreading, like the one that occurred in October 2020.

At a municipal level, Chapter V examined the collaborative relationship that Langutani municipality has built with informal settlements in the area, despite the apparent dichotomy between evictions and upgrading strategies for informal housing. Langutani municipality had both transformative and repressive forms of addressing informal settlements in the city. While the Department of Human Settlements has intended to create change ensuring collaborative settlement action with informal settlements; the Department of Land Invasion still attempts to evict ‘new builds’ to control the expansion of informal houses across the city within the legal framework, and consequently, maintain the subjugation of the subaltern.

At a neighbourhood level, the role of wards was explored as a relevant strategy introduced by the South African post-apartheid Government to promote participatory governance. The 1996 Constitution initiative of implementing ward committees in South Africa was claimed to be unique in the world, as it apparently allowed the local community to participate and engage with the municipality in running their affairs. However, the implementation of these committees raised concerns of representativity (the main allegations are against councillors for selecting ward committee members from their same political party) and narrowed formal routes to participation in South Africa. By introducing Ward 14, this research examined the poor communication between the ward councillor and Magangeni informal settlement and how the settlers of Magangeni felt their voice was not being heard.

To fully understand the extent of subjugation in Magangeni informal settlement, it was necessary to introduce the household level as the fourth level of power. As addressed in Chapter VI, Gaventa (2006) found that his framework was not easily applied to gender analysis as the power cube did not explicitly consider private space of power which have been shown to be important for understanding gender-power differences. In Gaventa’s later work in 2019, the power cube framework had drawn from feminist thinking on gender and power, especially the idea of invisible power, which focused on norms and internalised forms of oppression. As a result, the scholar extended the level dimensions to the ‘household level’ to make the link between power in domestic, private, and public spaces more explicit. Gaventa (ibid.) considered that breaking down the levels of power in categories of contextual relevance -such as households- could be relevant for grasping the relationality of power (as a woman might be more powerful at one level and less so at another). As this research adapted the power levels to national, municipal, and neighbourhood levels, the household was included as the fourth level of analysis for this chapter. Focusing on power dynamics at the household level and their interactions with those at the neighbourhood level, it became possible to illuminate how women's oppression is constructed and reproduced in Magangeni. As examined in Chapter VI, women in the informal settlement suffer intimate partner violence, experience economic dependency, and are threatened and silenced by partners and relatives. Moreover, these issues are closely related to others experienced at the local/neighbourhood level, such as safety and security and the role of the police and NGOs in Magangeni. The chapter findings suggest that the main feeling among women in Magangeni is a lack of trust at all power levels.

In summary, the South African national levels of power have arguably perpetuated the subjugation of the subalterns in Magangeni informal settlement by embracing neo-liberal reforms that have worsened the already precarious and disadvantaged positions of Mangageni’s informal settlement. The municipal level, in turn, has been characterised by an apparent dichotomy between evictions and upgrading strategies for informal housing. On the one hand, it has promoted policies perpetuating subalterns’ subjugation by eradicating informal settlements in the city. On the other hand, it has invited Magangeni informal settlement to the decision-making table (e.g., RRP), and included it as part of a pilot programme of upgrading the informal settlement conditions (e.g., UISP). At a neighbourhood level, the power dynamics have been conditioned by the original participatory aim of having ward committees. What could have worked as an interesting policy to alter the subalterns’ subjugation ended up promoting the exclusion of Magangeni informal settlement due to their differences with the ward councillor and their consequent lack of communication. Finally, at a household level, it was enlightened how women’s subjugation is constructed and reproduced in Magangeni through gendered power asymmetries, which contribute to shaping internal stratifications and subalternity. In this sense, a key contribution of this research is that of enlightening how the subalterns, often understood as a monolithic social block, can be better understood by examining internal stratifications and asymmetries, which are shaped by various processes and dimensions, such as gender and patriarchy.

These subjugations, in turn, affected and was affected by the second dimension of Gaventa’s power cube framework, namely spaces of power. As stated throughout my work, the power cube framework does not intend to be a checklist to check off each dimension or valorise one dimension over another. Instead, the main aim is to illustrate the complexity in which power can take across levels, spaces, and forms in an informal settlement and how these three dimensions are dynamic and interrelated. Hence, they will constantly re-define and affect each other.

*Spaces of power*

Gaventa (2006) describes spaces of power as the opportunities and moments where individuals or groups can influence policies and decisions that may affect their lives and interests. According to Cornwall (2002), spaces for participation are not neutral. They are shaped by power relations, which both surround and enter them. For Gaventa (2006, p.26), “power relations help to shape the boundaries of participatory spaces, what is possible within them, and who may enter, with which identities, discourses and interests”. Spaces of power could be closed, invited, or claimed (Gaventa, 2006). Closed spaces of power describe decisions made by a set of actors ‘behind doors’ with no intention of including others. Invited spaces of power occur when individuals or organisations are invited to participate by other institutions or organisations. Created spaces of power, in turn, can emerge from popular mobilisation, identity-based concerns or simply spaces in which a community join in common pursuits (Cornwall, 2002).

In terms of spaces of power, both the national government and the ward committee operated through closed spaces of power that have arguably also perpetuated the levels of subjugation the subaltern faced. On the one hand, at a national level, the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) and the White Paper of Housing in 1994 intended to eradicate all informal settlements. After assuming that they were not going to be able to provide and secure ‘formal housing’ to the whole of the South African population, the Government decided to shift its housing policy towards upgrading informal settlements (yet, as above explained, these policies have been far from giving more autonomy or power to the subalterns). On the other hand, at a local level, from the empirical material, it emerged that many in Magangeni informal settlement do not feel represented by their ward leaders. Magangeni is part of Ward 14, but the informal settlement has no representation on the ward committee and has severe difficulties communicating with the ward councillor. Arguably, the communication is very poor because the ward councillor represents the Democratic Alliance (DA), and Magangeni leaders have been historically related to the ANC. After not feeling represented, considered, or heard, Magangeni informal settlement has had to find ways other than the ‘formal’ channels of participation to state their needs and claim their rights. These alternative avenues have included engaging with other stakeholders acting as intermediaries with municipality officers or bypassing the councillor to communicate directly with the local government.

Also, regarding closed spaces of power, Chapter VI described how in October 2020, male representatives of the informal settlement area committee planned a protest to demand formal access to electricity and new toilets. Protesting was decided behind doors and with no intention of including women. Even though the strike was organised to demand formal access to electricity and new toilets for the whole settlement, men considered that women would be “scared of striking because of the police”, or that the strike was “not going to be strong enough” if women were part of it. While not part of the decision-making, women of the committee decided to participate in the protest against the Municipality demanding access to essential services in the settlement. In so doing, they invited other women of the settlement to join the protest. After women showed up in the strike, men agreed to fight together. Once part of the protest, women reprimanded the men on the committee because of the violence it was taking. But, according to the female participants, men chose not to listen. For female research participants, the unilateral and violent decisions taken by male representatives of the area committee put most women in the settlement at risk.

Chapter V presented a particular initiative (RRP) regarding invited spaces of participation. The municipality invited the community –including Magangeni informal settlement- to improve their living conditions and actively protect and restore the land and river environment (RRP project). Gaventa (2006) defines invited spaces of power as when individuals or organisations are invited to participate by other institutions or organisations. These spaces may be regularised, or more temporary, through one-off forms of consultation. In the RRP, Magangeni representatives were arguably incorporated in the project's planning, decision-making, and implementation. The RRP was described as an innovative shared-governance approach to catchment-scale ecological infrastructure management with a climate change adaptation focus. The project primarily focuses on the conservation, rehabilitation and restoration of natural systems within the river to improve community resilience toward climate change. Among the potential benefits of the project, Langutani municipality identified the restoration of ecological infrastructure for ecosystem provisioning, and the improvement of the resilience of communities to climate change impacts, especially in informal settlements; and that the local communities were now expected to be part of the project’s planning and decision-making.

Chapter VII examined how the decision of relocating informal settlements during the pandemic was planned under closed spaces of power but, arguably, implemented through invited spaces of participation. The decision of de-densifying/evicting/re-blocking informal settlements during the pandemic was made behind doors by the South African government with no intention of including other actors. Once the de-densifying decision was taken, and arguably due to their expertise in the informal settlements, the government invited NGOs to engage in the process of implementation. The NGOs and their role in the process were not informed to the public (at least not during the first months of lockdown when the data for this research was being collected). And while the government invited NGOs to the table, the invitation was not extended to those living in informal settlements. In silencing subaltern voices and asking NGOs to inform them, what the government was arguably doing was perpetuating the marginalisation of the subaltern. NGOs were in charge of speaking and acting on behalf of the voiceless. What NGOs were doing when partnering with the government was arguably contributing to excluding the people they claimed to defend. In other words, NGOs ran the risk of speaking on behalf of the most marginalised and perpetuating an act of epistemic violence. For Spivak (1988), not speaking for themselves and/or not having their contributions recognised, is a form of oppression and violence inflicted on the subalterns.

From the findings, it emerged that there are spaces claimed by the subalterns against the power holders or created more autonomously. In other words, the subalterns reject spaces created without them and create spaces for themselves. These claimed or created spaces can emerge from popular mobilisation, identity-based concerns (based on people’s culture, shared history, and beliefs) or simply spaces in which a community join in common pursuit (Cornwall, 2002). Self-claimed spaces would extend the idea of participation to one of citizenship, understanding it more as a political right rather than just as an invitation offered to beneficiaries of development’ (Gaventa, 2004). In Magangeni informal settlement, these claimed spaces have acted through conflict strategies and tactics to pressure those in power.

The actions taken by settlers can be interpreted as everyday acts of resistance to local authorities, such as illegally connecting to electricity and water services and protesting in the streets. These claimed spaces have ultimately led to increased participation with the municipality, shown in the production of Memorandums of Understanding (MoU) on some occasions. When consulted on their preferred way to pressure those in power and get their voice heard, most of the Magangeni area committee members answered it was by asking for a meeting with municipality officers. When the same question was asked to settlers of Magangeni who did not participate in the area committee, the vast majority replied it was through strikes and protests in the streets. These different positions held by committee members and dwellers offer another opportunity to enlighten the existence of different subject positions within the subalterns and the importance of avoiding conceiving the subaltern as a monolithic block. More specifically, by analysing spaces of power, it emerges that within the subalterns, the level of proximity to institutional power holders shapes different possible strategies for addressing subalternity.

According to Panatazidou (2012), claimed spaces of power can allow marginalised groups to shape the rules and norms of engagement and deliberate and articulate their agendas before entering invited spaces of power or advocating on the edges of closed spaces. Moreover, according to the scholar, claimed space of power could both nurture empowerment and give birth to new strategies for addressing hidden and visible forms of power (as discussed in the following subsection). Consequently, as examined in Chapter VI, forming a women’s area committee is an example of a political outcome that could help challenge the above-mentioned forms of power in Magangeni. According to some female research participants, just as men in Magangeni would tend to side with each other (especially if they have a kinship relation), women should do the same to protect each other and act. In so doing, women could arguably challenge invisible forms of power of what the dominant male considers normal or beneficial. This would eventually encourage a process through which female dwellers could develop a critical consciousness of the power being shaped over their lives and eventually take action to overrule it and shift from a position of subordination to one of hegemony (Gramsci, 1971). Yet, arguably due to the fear of being threatened or physically abused, female dwellers have opted not to create or participate in a women’s committee. Eventually, the implementation of a women’s area committee was discarded. In that sense, female dwellers in Mgangeni would encounter a vicious cycle. They suffer physical and sexual abuse, but they do not report it due to mistrust of the police and of the area committee. The idea of forming a women’s committee, in turn, would eventually expose them to (the threat of) further physical violence. Furthermore, claiming these new spaces of power would, they feared, eventually cause them further exclusion and marginalisation from the area committee and other male dwellers.

In summary, both the national government and the ward committee have operated through closed spaces of power that have arguably also perpetuated the levels of subjugation the subalterns of Magangeni informal settlement face. During the lockdown, government policies also exacerbated the subjugation of people living in informality. Moreover, within the informal settlement, male representatives of the informal settlement area committee also operated through closed spaces of participation showing unilateral and violent decisions that put most women in the settlement at risk (e.g., when striking, as exposed in Chapter VI). Alternatively, through invited spaces of participation, Magangeni informal settlement was incorporated in the RRP's planning, decision-making, and implementation, arguably opening spaces to alter their subjugation. Arguably, it is through claimed spaces of power where the subalterns have had more alternatives to alter their subjugation as the needs and initiatives to achieve those needs come from them precisely to pressure those in power.

*Forms of power*

In the power cube framework, Gaventa (2006) divides forms of power into visible, hidden, and invisible. Visible forms of power refer to observable decision-making, where formal rules, structures, and procedures operate. Hidden forms of power relate to setting the political agenda. Here is where advocacy strategies intend to influence how the agenda is shaped to increase the visibility and legitimacy of the demands of a specific group of individuals. Finally, invisible forms of power would eventually shape the meanings people are expected to accept. These forms of power could perpetuate exclusion and inequality by defining what is accepted as normal (VeneKlasen and Miller, 2002; Gaventa, 2006).

Regarding the different forms of power, Magangeni informal settlement organises through an area committee that represents a visible form of power at a community level. The committee follows formal rules, structures, and decision-making procedures that adopt standard forms of organising and procedures found more broadly in other informal settlements in South Africa. In numbers, the committee is equally represented by men and women from the four different sections in the settlement. And while most of its members identify themselves with the ANC, some identify themselves with other political parties. As discussed in Chapter V, when a dweller has a problem, the committee will analyse the situation, call those involved to a meeting, and then decide what to do. The power the informal settlement committee has ‘over’ others is decided ‘with’ the committee, and ‘for’ the community. And while it is not against the law to disobey the committee’s decisions, most of the dwellers would comply with the described rules and procedures. Arguably, this practice could demonstrate that the area committee is considered a legitimate institution by the dwellers, open to the community and to debate anything and everything, where no one is to feel marginalised or discriminated against. However, several invisible forms of power within the committee also exist, especially regarding discrimination and gender inequality that could subjugate specific individuals and groups of subalterns. As emerged from the data analysis, issues such as kinship-based power protection would be considered ‘normal’ in Magangeni. While it is not written or explicitly addressed, those coming from a specific region of the country would feel -and arguably be more protected than others.

Chapter VI addressed hidden and invisible forms of power affecting women in Magangeni informal settlement. In that sense, a plausible reason female dwellers would seldom report a case of physical or sexual abuse is their economic dependency on their male partners. While most of the dwellers of Magangeni struggle to get a job, it is even more difficult for women. The settlement still follows a gender-based role expectation in which men are the main provider, and women are responsible for caring, domestic tasks and housekeeping. Besides, if it was hard for the informal settlement dwellers to get a job in non-covid times, during the outbreak, it was even more challenging (as previously described). Once the restrictions were partially eased, the Municipality offered piece job opportunities to Magangeni dwellers. However, as most of the jobs were in the construction sector, the area committee decided only to provide these opportunities to men. In this context, the women in the settlement were economically dependent on the government’s help and their partners’ income. As the government’s support took time and was not constant, women increased their economic dependence on their partners. This situation arguably encouraged women to remain silent about intimate partner violence, desist from reporting, and hence keep the *status quo*. Consequently, these gendered power asymmetries -which contribute to shaping internal stratifications and subalternity in Magangeni informal settlement- will be continuously shaped and reproduced by dynamics and processes within the subalterns and by different institutional practices and initiatives, as further explored in the following subsection.

Chapter VIII discussed how visible and invisible forms of power and invited and claimed spaces of power co-exist for the subalterns organising after a fire broke out in Magangeni. The informal settlement organises through an area committee legitimised by its dwellers and recognised by other stakeholders when coordinating help after an emergency. This help, in turn, comes in the form of temporary solutions without addressing the roots of the problems identified by the research participants, namely, their exposure to poor structural quality of housing, overcrowding, and the lack of access to basic services. Arguably, the provision of an emergency tent, food, water cans and building materials the municipality offered after the fire did not address the root causes of poverty and inequality – causes that have led to the existence of Magangeni. Heavy rains would not be an issue if Magangeni was not built on a flood plain. Fires would not be that common if the dwellers had access to legal electricity connections; the place would not be overcrowded if they had better building materials. In the same vein, this chapter discussed how the dwellers’ self-organising could eventually overcome the rules, structures, and decision-making procedures assigned to the area committee or the municipality. In that sense, the dwellers’ behaviour in dealing with the neighbours who caused the fire accident and their reaction to the municipality’s late help demonstrate the various and different decisions that the subalterns can take when facing an emergency. Likewise, subalterns can adopt different identities depending on the context and their relationships. Magangeni committee could subjugate some of the dwellers and at the same time be subjugated by national and local levels of power. When the area committee’s male representatives were striking for better living conditions and opportunities for the settlement, they intentionally did not include women, perpetuating the exclusion and vulnerability of women living in Magangeni. These heterogeneous identities and overlapping positions of the subalterns are further addressed in the conclusions drawn for the second aim of this research.

***9.1.2 Specific Aim 2: To explore the complexities of the subalterns organising in an informal settlement, addressing how their multiple and heterogeneous identities, overlapping positions, and shifting alliances go beyond fixed and mutually exclusive categories.***

The findings that emerged from the data analysis suggest the subalterns face different levels of subjugation, which would be conceptually interrelated to the multiple and heterogeneous identities in Magangeni informal settlement. An example of a specific group of subjugated subalterns was addressed in Chapter VI, where the focus was on subaltern women and the Western control over the Global South’s women identities and their production of knowledge. In that sense, what was observed and analysed at a micro-level needed to be understood within broader dynamics of oppression. At a macro level, this chapter examined how women have been oppressed by patriarchy/sexism, colonialism, and the economic system, among other forms of power. At a micro-level, the chapter addressed the ways women in Magangeni are exposed to different levels of marginalisation and subjugation; because of living in an informal settlement, because of being a woman, because of living alone, because of kinship (not having family ties in the settlement), because of being an immigrant, or because of all the above. In other words, of those women already subjugated because of being black and being poor, there would be three other differences that can lead to exclusions and expose them to an even more vulnerable position -namely the place where they came to live in the settlement, their kinship relationships, and whether they live with a partner. Besides, in Magangeni, the agency of subaltern women is arguably limited to their role in joining the rest of the informal settlement in collective claims for access to basic needs. As discussed in Chapter VI, their particular challenges have been silenced by threats and lack of interest of other actors subjugating any attempt at women’s self-organising. In that sense, subaltern women in Magangeni would arguably lack space to speak of their identities and fear self-organising to challenge those hegemonic practices subjugating them.

Chapters VII and VIII, in turn, addressed the challenges faced by another subaltern group amidst the Covid-19 pandemic and, most especially, after the fire incident, namely undocumented migrants. During the strict lockdown imposed by the South African government, migrants were far from their original homes and (often) had no access to reliable information in their own language. Many lost their precarious jobs, and others were detained or forced to return home. As emerged from the findings, undocumented migrantswereomitted from the South African government’s response plans due to their irregular legal conditions in the country. Because of not having regularised documents, they could not receive help from the municipality. This applied not only for Covid-19 or the fire incident of October 2020 but for any other social grant they were not allowed to obtain. As ‘not regularised’ immigrants, they formed an integral part of the South African informal economy but existed only on the margins of the nation’s political and social life. In Magangeni informal settlement, it was only after the involvement of NGOs and other civil society actors that migrants eventually had access to basic services and protective equipment. Not being able to access the government’s help amidst the pandemic, nor to go back to their countries due to lack of economic resources, the undocumented migrants were dependent on the help of civil society organisations. The undocumented immigrants living in the informal settlement did not have the same rights. In that sense, it has arguably been in the attribution of difference that the logic of dominance and subordination would have had expression. For Pandey (2006), men are not considered different; women are.

Accordingly, in Magangeni informal settlement, it would not be the South African nationals the different; it is the immigrants. Consequently, drawing on Pandey (ibid.), to understand power dynamics in Magangeni, it is crucial to consider the often-neglected relationship between dominance/subordination and the attribution of difference. This insight could also help analyse the situation of women and immigrants subjugated in multiple ways. Different as poor, different as black, different as woman, and different as a migrant. In the words of Pandey, difference as subalternity. Subalternity as difference. As exposed throughout this work, in South Africa, the ‘informal’ has been ‘the different’ and ‘the other’, which needs to be changed.

The subalterns’ heterogeneity and different subjugations above described would, in turn, condition the complexities of understanding organising and resistance in Magangeni informal settlement. In that sense, depending on the situation and the context, the dwellers are organised through separate groups to address different challenges or as one homogeneous group to have greater political leverage (what Spivak called “strategic essentialism”). To discuss how and to what extent the different power dynamics interrelate among different actors, Chapter V introduced how the municipality and the neighbourhood connected and worked in partnership as part of the River Rehabilitation Project (RRP) to protect and restore the land and river environment. As part of the city’s Resilience Strategy, the Department of Human Settlement in Langutani Municipality adopted a collaborative approach in which different stakeholders were invited to the table. Among those stakeholders was UTFS, which has conducted research in the area since 2014. In line with their participatory approach to research and social change, UTFS asked the municipality to invite Magangeni dwellers to participate in the decision-making. The power and privilege of the UTFS researcher -arguably due to her whiteness or her contacts in the municipality- allowed her to suggest and incorporate stakeholders into the table. Her power and privilege in both the municipality and the informal settlement allowed me as a researcher to get access to the informal settlement and to the participants who took part in this research, too.

In the findings I presented in Chapter VI, different subaltern women asked to support each other and unite against oppression. Despite their different subjugations, the formation of a women’s area committee and further representation in the existent informal settlement committee were examples of collective resistance that the participants suggested could help achieve greater self-representation in Magangeni. Chapter VIII, in turn, examined how acting as a homogeneous group -linked by their shared vulnerability and strengthening their social relationships- arguably helped the dwellers overcome their immediate challenges after the fire. In that sense, Magangeni informal settlement committee organised the help so that all the fire victims, including those marginalised by the municipality, could access essential needs after the fire.

As presented in the findings, I illuminated three strategies of collective resistance identified in mainstream literature (Mitlin, 2018) -namely collaboration, contention, and subversion- that have been deployed simultaneously and iteratively by the subalterns in Magangeni. Chapter VII, for example, addressed how engaging in collaboration with the local government and civil society organisations amidst the pandemic eventually helped Magangeni access to basic services. Despite the first months of the pandemic, the informal settlement dwellers did not organise any specific protests or rallies to pressure the government; Magangeni was still illegally connected to electricity and water. Furthermore, while Magangeni was part of the RRP, communication with the ward councillor, which was supposed to be the formal communication channel with the municipality, was almost inexistent. Accordingly, while being part of the RRP, Magangeni dwellers did not stop claiming their needs throughout claimed spaces of participation. Magangeni dwellers sat at the table with Langutani municipality for the RRP but protested and barricaded on the streets to ask the municipality for better access to basic services such as water and electricity. In that sense, the Magangeni informal settlement engaged in conflict with the municipality and collaborated with the municipality. Magangeni was heard by some Langutani municipality departments but silenced by others. They communicated well with some municipal officers but not with the ward councillor who represented them in the municipality. Arguably, the ability to do all these would come from the openness of the informal settlement to these contradictions and the understanding that conflict and dissensus are central to the practice of organising (DeFilippis et al. 2007).

In summary, the subjugation the subalterns face in Magangeni and the complexities of their organising will be interrelated to the multiple and heterogeneous identities and shifting alliances that can be adopted in the informal settlement. Besides, as emerged from the findings, Magangeni dwellers can adopt overlapping positions depending on their situations. A man who rapes a woman in the settlement can attack another rapist to protect the victim. A woman can advise another woman to report intimate partner violence but silence her suffering. The area committee would be equally represented by men and women but will not always invite female representatives to decision-making. Women will agree on the importance of having a women’s committee in the settlement and desist from participating. The latter behaviour is further addressed in the conclusions drawn for the third aim of this research.

***9.1.3 Specific Aim 3: To address the organising of the subalterns and social sustainability as part of a broader debate on inclusion, social justice, and participation, challenging mainstream technocratic discourses.***

In my review of the literature (Chapter III), I drew on Polese and Stren’s (2000) definition of social sustainability, understanding social sustainability as a type of development that promotes the coexistence of culturally and socially diverse groups, encouraging social integration and improving the quality of life of all segments of the population. This chapter also highlighted two overarching dimensions of social sustainability: social equity aspects and issues related to the sustainability of the community itself (Bramley and Power, 2009). Whereas social equity centres upon a distributive notion of social justice related to access to services, facilities, and opportunities, sustainability of the community involves interaction with other residents or social networks, pride or sense of place, participation in collective community activities, and security.

The findings illuminated that the South African government has been far from improving the dwellers’ quality of life in terms of access to services, facilities, and opportunities. Despite different housing policies and intentions to collaborate with informal settlements, the Covid-19 pandemic and the fire incident demonstrated the high levels of vulnerability to which Magangeni dwellers are still exposed. Consequently, including Magangeni dwellers in the RRP was supposed to help to address an alternative view of sustainability, understanding economic, environmental, and social concerns as intersecting in the practices and perspectives of the subalterns in urban areas (Boyer et al. 2016) and as part of a broader debate on inclusion, social justice, and participation of informal settlement dwellers. However, the UTFS invitation to Magangeni to be part of the table also brought several tensions (addressed throughout the power cube framework in Chapter V). While Langutani’s Department of Human Settlement accepted Magangeni in the RRP and was piloting a partnership-based model of incremental settlement upgrading (about to start in Magangeni before the outbreak of Covid-19), Langutani’s Department of Land Invasion continued evicting new builds in different informal settlements in the area.

As outlined and discussed in Chapter III, one of the main problems of following a social sustainability approach to development is embedded in capitalism’s contradictions. Barbosa et al. (2014) have argued that a democratic ecological and social order cannot match a market order which seeks profit and uncontrolled accumulation. Goodland (2002) discusses how capitalism may weaken social sustainability by promoting competition and individualism over community cooperation. Foladori (2005), in turn, affirms that social sustainability is still restricted to technical changes that can improve the standards of living in certain specific but limited sectors, always within the framework of the capitalist market system (Foladori, 2005). Arguably, in South Africa, this situation worsened after the pandemic outbreak. By 2021, South Africa had recorded the highest number of COVID- 19 cases in the African continent and was part of the top 20 countries in the world that had been hit hard by the pandemic (Chitsamatanga and Ntlama-Makhanya, 2021).

As described in Chapter VII, in March 2020, the South African government implemented strict conditions to curb the spread of this virus. After locking down the country, the government’s plan regarding Covid-19 in informal settlements was to demolish the shacks and relocate its residents. Yet, this was not new in South African history regarding epidemic outbreaks (Smit, 2020). While the bubonic plague in the country in 1901 resulted in relocating all black African residents, the influenza pandemic of 1918-1919 led to a new Health Act and Housing Act that encouraged the demolition of slums and relocation of people to new housing areas (UN-Habitat, 2020). For Smit (2020), implementing these policies was problematic. Previous experience has shown that the relocation process could increase social exclusion and vulnerability, with residents ending up far from employment facilities and opportunities and severely disrupting their social network. Accordingly, Nyashanu et al. (2020) state the problem of informal settlements is not how to eradicate them but how to make them habitable. In that sense, the Covid-19 outbreak highlighted what, for Chitsamatanga and Ntlama-Makhanya (2021), are the underlying socio-economic challenges that the South African subaltern communities have historically faced since apartheid. Namely, resolve the divisive and segregating apartheid structure that oppressed informal settlements by subjecting residents to inadequate service delivery, deprivation, unemployment, and inequality.

Furthermore, the informal settlement dwellers would not only be subjugated to inadequate service delivery, deprivation, unemployment, and inequality. They would also be expected to minimise those external shocks and pragmatically ‘bounce back’ as rapidly as possible from adversity to respond to new challenges (Amo-Agyemang, 2021). Consequently, it has been argued that in current neoliberal times, we would be witnessing a shift in the conceptualisation of the agency of the subalterns from agency-as-resistance to agency-as-resilience, where resilience would be part of the organised practices through which populations are being governed (Bracke, 2016). If resilience is understood as the capacity to absorb shocks while maintaining structure and function through an emphasis on transformability and adaptability (Folke, 2006), Bracke (2016) argues resilience is part of the organised practices through which populations are governed in neoliberal times. According to the scholar, a resilient individual or group organising would now be expected to absorb the effects of exploitation and dispossession and continue to be integrated and ‘productive’ within the context of neoliberalism.

The notion of resilience has arguably been highlighted and incorporated by Langutani municipality as a relevant guideline for their policymaking for the last ten years. As examined in Chapter V, in December 2013, the city was selected as one of the first 32 cities to be included in the Rockefeller Foundation’s International 100 Resilient Cities Programme. Consequently, as part of the city’s Resilience Strategy 2017, the Department of Human Settlements invited Magangeni informal settlement to participate in the River Rehabilitation Project. The project focused on the conservation, rehabilitation, and restoration of natural systems within the area to improve community resilience toward climate change. Among the potential benefits of the project, Langutani municipality identified the improvement of the resilience of communities to climate change impacts and that local communities were now expected to be part of the project’s planning and decision-making. Accordingly, initiatives such as the Upgrading Informal Settlement Programme (UISP) that was starting (and interrupted during the pandemic) in Magangeni would eventually help to include and listen to the local demands of the subaltern. In that sense, it has been through the organising of a series of partnerships and participatory governance between the local government, civil society organisations, and Magangeni dwellers that activities have arguably helped the subaltern to ‘bounce back’ by reducing exposure to vulnerability in the settlement amidst the Covid-19 pandemic and after the fire incident.

Yet, from a decolonial perspective, Amo-Agyemang (2021) criticises the limits of what he considers the Western conceptualisations of hegemonic logics of resilience in Africa. Hence there would exist a preconception that powerless African populations are more resilient because they adapt to misfortune and can rapidly shift strategies. This presumption, in turn, leads to a continuation of oppression in which the subaltern would be trapped within these discourses and unable to build different forms of life. His key argument is that resilience cannot be secured to one-size-fits-all solutions at the expense of silenced imaginaries. Therefore, for the scholar, resilience is rooted in colonial knowledge, subjectivity, and power. As discussed in the previous chapters, these assumptions could only lead to a continuation of oppression in which the subalterns would be trapped within these discourses and unable to build different forms of life. Hence the importance of this research in retrieving non-Western realities informed by the perspectives of the subalterns, which have often been marginalised and silenced in mainstream literature, as addressed throughout this work.

This research reflected on the need to frame social sustainability from a dimension in which the question was ‘what type of society it is that one planned to sustain’ in Magangeni informal settlement. Drawing from literature in multiple disciplines, including urban planning and management studies, to highlight the importance of acknowledging ‘place-based, process-oriented perspectives’, my work aimed to understand the three pillars of sustainability (economic-environmental-social) as integrated concepts intersecting in the practices and perspectives of research participants. Consequently, place-based and process-oriented sustainability efforts were expected to encourage local ownership of ideas, assure access to necessary resources, and engage informal settlement dwellers in decision-making in a process of dialogue among diverse individuals with distinct social, economic, and environmental interests in Magangeni informal settlement.

Magangeni is situated in a geographically and environmentally sensitive area. Dwellers live in a flood plain next to a river, putting their shacks and lives at permanent risk. When the city in which Magangeni informal settlement is located experiences heavy rains, the dwellers know they are exposed to losing their houses and will eventually have to look for temporary shelter. Magangeni dwellers are susceptible to a range of potentially harmful hazards and perturbations because of the conditions in which they live and the land that they use. Shacks are built adjacent to one another and in a geographically sensitive area, as described earlier in this chapter. There is also a lack of adequate sanitation facilities, occupants (especially women) lack safety and security, and most dwellers have not secured a job. Besides, these vulnerabilities have worsened amidst the Covid-19 pandemic. Because of problems of density, mobility, access to water, toilets, and sanitation, among others, Magangeni informal settlement dwellers count with no opportunities for social distancing; they move between homes, share spaces and food, use toilets in shared facilities, and often maintain strong ties with home regions travelling between urban and rural settings frequently. In that sense, amidst the pandemic, the subalterns of Magangeni have also been highly exposed to getting Covid and giving it to their neighbours.

In summary, my research highlighted two overarching dimensions of social sustainability: social equity aspects and issues related to the community itself. In line with the conclusions drawn for the first two aims of this research, it acknowledged that in Magangeni informal settlement, different power dynamics occur, different identities are adopted, different types of subjugation are experienced, and they can all be theoretically interrelated. In so doing, the conclusions drawn from this aim incorporated the organising of the subalterns and its links to social sustainability as part of a broader debate on inclusion, social justice, and participation. Consequently, it reflected on the problems of understanding social sustainability as a concept embedded in the contradictions of capitalism, engaging with the discussion of the apparent shift of agency-as-resistance to agency-as-resilience that would have been taking part in current neoliberal times. The discussion on resistance and resilience is further examined in the conclusions drawn from the research question.

**9.1.4** **Research Question: To what extent and how do power dynamics affect the organising of the subalterns in an informal settlement in South Africa?**

The conclusions drawn from the three research aims can inform reconceptualisation of forms of knowledge about informal organising. As examined through this research, power dynamics and organisational practices shaped the self-organising of the subalterns in Magangeni in different ways. The different levels, spaces, and forms of power of the various stakeholders involved in the informal settlement have conditioned the strategies and the aims of the subalterns’ self-organising. The national level of power has interacted through mechanisms of visible forms of power and closed spaces of participation. At a municipal level, closed spaces of power have been interchangeably used with invited spaces of power. At a neighbourhood level, visible and invisible forms of power have coexisted with closed, invited, and claimed spaces of participation. Similar dynamics happened at the household level, mainly affected by invisible forms of power.

These power dynamics and organisational practices have been affected by the context and settings under which they exist. In a neoliberal world order, the subalterns are both marginalised and subjugated by the inherent conditions of a capitalist system. The ways through which dwellers organised themselves in the fire’s aftermath is arguably an example of what Paret (2018) has considered a critical feature of South African subalterns’ organisation since the return of democracy, namely, focusing on securing narrow improvements within local residential areas instead of seeking large-scale transformations. As examined in Chapter VIII, informal settlement dwellers would necessarily have to focus on ‘localised struggles’ because “they must emphasise strategies, organisations, and associations that respond directly to their immediate concerns” (Bayat, 2013, p.201). Therefore, local protests would be more ‘manageable’ for the subalterns (than broad transformative struggles) because they (the subalterns) determine their aims and control the expected outcomes (ibid.). According to Magangeni informal settlement dwellers, the immediate needs after a fire outbreak would be closely related to the challenges posed by enduring conditions of deprivation and vulnerability they experience in the informal settlement. As described throughout my research, Magangeni dwellers face challenges due to: poor structural quality and the combustibility of the construction materials of their shacks (mainly corrugated iron, advertising boards, plastic, and wood); overcrowding (affecting their narrow pathways in the settlement); lack of safety and security; and the lack of access to basic services (encouraging illegally connecting to water and electricity as previously examined). Consequently, their protests and demands would be directed to address those specific challenges and needs.

As described by the research participants, they want to have a safe place to live and better access to essential services. In that sense, their major concerns after the fire were asking the municipality to provide legal electricity connections and having fire hydrants closer to the settlement to help prevent fire incidents. Their organising did not include other informal settlements at a national or a ward level. Their organising after the fire was about securing access to basic services, clothes, food, and blankets and did not include claims for formal housing relocation. As emerged from this work, the self-organising of Magangeni subalterns has focused primarily on immediate needs and basic demands. What was once the claim for formal and definitive housing for informal settlement dwellers in the country has now arguably turned out to be a fight to upgrade the conditions of their informal settlement and increase access to basic services. This organising, in turn, could arguably be interpreted as a matter of resilience and not resistance against a neoliberal system. As described by Bracke (2016), a resilient group organising would be expected to absorb the effects of dispossession and continue to be integrated within the context of neoliberalism. Yet, if the neoliberal system imposed the privatisation of basic services by illegally connecting to water and electricity, Magangeni informal settlement dwellers would also contest the neoliberal arrangements of their context. As examined in Chapter III, the organising of ‘the urban poor’ changed after the end of the apartheid in South Africa. The acts of illegally occupying a piece of land and then refusing to leave the place and the illegal connections to electricity and water facilities after the local government denies them essential services have all been considered new resistance tactics (Mottiar, 2019). They can also be an important modality through which the subalterns can transform power relations towards their interests (ibid.). Consequently, this thesis acknowledged these acts of everyday resistance as not-formalised, disguised and quiet forms of organising that subaltern use in their everyday lives mainly for primary survival purposes (Scott, 1985). As opposed to organising through riots and demonstrations, everyday resistance understands that the course of events is often contingent and unplanned and that the subaltern can also resist through uncoordinated and direct action.

Moreover, the organising of the informal settlement dwellers is affected by the multiple and heterogenous identities existing in Magangeni. These identities are, in turn, interrelated to the theoretical discussions on subjugation and power dynamics mentioned above. In that sense, Chapters VI, VII, and VII analysed the cases of two particular groups among the subalterns, namely women and undocumented immigrants. At a macro-level, it was discussed how women had been oppressed by patriarchy/sexism, colonialism, and the economic system, among other forms of power. At a micro-level, the data showed the ways women in Magangeni are exposed to different levels of marginalisation and subjugation; because of living in an informal settlement, because of being a woman, because of living alone, because of kinship, because of being an immigrant, or because all the above. This work also addressed the challenges faced by undocumented immigrants amidst the Covid-19 pandemic and, most significantly, after the fire incident. During the lockdown, migrants had no access to reliable information in their own language, many lost their precarious jobs, and others were detained or forced to return home. As emerged from the findings, undocumented migrantswereomitted from the South African government’s response plans due to their irregular legal conditions in the country.

In summary, organisational practices of the subaltern in Magangeni have been shaped by the interrelated power dynamics to which they are exposed, by their differences and heterogeneity, by the neoliberal world order in which they exist, and by their immediate needs and narrow demands. All these factors were aggravated amidst the pandemic of Covid-19 and the fire incident of October 2020. Once the government announced a strict national lockdown (March 2020), people lost their jobs, overcrowding and access to basic services worsened, and more cases of gender-based violence were exposed (but not reported).

**9.2 Contributions**

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| **Methodological** | The methods developed during this research offer insights into how participatory action research may be adapted to work in situations where close contact is not possible. In that sense, this research contributes to opening a field of participatory approach from a distance.In the case used in this research, the methods were adjusted in response to measures introduced to control the spread of the Covid-19 virus, including social distancing and travel restrictions. The methodology conducted in this research also invites MOS scholars to re-think and reflect on the quality, ethics, and relationships between researcher and researched, knowledge and power, and research and social action that characterises PAR (and its possible tensions with current institutional ethical review procedures in academia).  |
| **Empirical** | The participatory approach and co-production of knowledge adopted in this research are committed to reforming research practices by strengthening subalterns' voices at an individual and collective level. In so doing, this work intended to provide insight into organising practices and narratives that are ignored in mainstream western management and organisation literature and open new spaces to those who have been made voiceless in the knowledge production of these studies in the Global South. I argue that opening these spaces can help to recognise and encourage the need for social action and the development of critical knowledge and practical understanding to enable change in Magangeni informal settlement. |
| **Theoretical/ Conceptual** | As argued throughout this work, mainstream MOS has not considered the particular contexts of the marginalised organising in urban areas in the Global South, neglecting the complexities of power dynamics in informal organising. This work combines alternative approaches from critical management studies, international development, and subaltern urban studies to tackle these gaps in knowledge and to construct and open new intersectional avenues to reflect on. In so doing, it emphasises the need to examine innovative and alternative ways of thinking and understanding the subalterns, their forms of participation, and the spaces they occupy in urban areas. The tensions and contradictions of the power dynamics of the subalterns’ organising and its heterogeneity examined throughout this work can also lead to reconceptualisations that help inform how to understand and enable a more nuanced knowledge about informal organising. Consequently, my research enlightens how the subalterns, often understood as a monolithic social block, can be better understood by examining internal stratifications and asymmetries shaped by various processes and dimensions, such as gender and patriarchy.This thesis also acknowledges how academic production inevitably implies some forms of oppression of the subalterns. Arguably, the subaltern cannot be represented adequately by academic knowledge because academic knowledge is a practice that would actively produce subalternity in the very act of presenting it. And while there seems not to be a straightforward solution to this dilemma, by problematising and reflecting on my positionality as a researcher, this work aims to contribute to the debate on the representation of the subalterns in MOS. Regarding the theoretical framework in this study, Gaventa (2019) recognises that his power cube framework is not the only tool for power analysis, nor should it be, as other approaches can help focus more explicitly on actors. Hence, in addition to the dimensions proposed by the power cube framework, in this thesis, I also incorporated a power/interest grid (DfID, 2002; Mathur et al., 2007) to examine to what extent the involvement of the different stakeholders could affect the informal settlement organising. By combining different power analysis tools, I aimed to develop more nuanced answers to how and who experiences power at different levels, what kind of power was being exercised, and how actors were enabled or constrained by that power. Furthermore, Gaventa (2006) found that his framework was not easily applied to gender analysis as the power cube did not explicitly introduce private spaces of power which are critical realms in gender studies. In his later work in 2019, the scholar extended the level dimensions to the ‘household level’ to make the link between power in domestic, private, and public spaces more explicit. Consequently, to fully understand the extent of subjugation in Magangeni informal settlement, it was necessary to introduce the household level as a potential fourth level of power in this research. Focusing on power dynamics at the household level and their interactions with those at the neighbourhood level made it possible to enlighten how women's oppression is constructed and reproduced in Magangeni.  |

**9.3 Research limitations/ Tensions**

By conducting participatory action research in this work, I intended to develop an ongoing learning process that could contribute to participation and social change in Magangeni. In so doing, the research analysis aimed to help both Magangeni address power imbalances and oppressive practices that could affect their organising and my doctoral degree award. These asymmetrical power relations between myself -as a university-based researcher- and dwellers-as the researched- were constantly in tension and, therefore, addressed throughout my work. On the one hand, my role as a researcher was to theorise, explain, and produce data that would meet the University requirements and expectations of a PhD thesis, having primary control over the research. On the other hand, I aimed to involve Magangeni subalterns in the cycle of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting throughout the entire investigation. Yet, inviting/representing the subalterns could be considered a contradiction itself. As examined in the Methodology chapter, “the subaltern points to power and representation, and the difﬁculty of representing the subaltern points to the power of disciplinary knowledge in the academy. The subaltern cannot be represented adequately by academic knowledge because academic knowledge is a practice that actively produces subalternity, in the very act of presenting it” (Bracke, 2016, p.846). This critique represents a significant challenge to academics and intellectuals’ role in silencing subaltern voices. For Spivak (1988), it pushes researchers to look for their involvement in creating and reproducing relations of power and subordination. According to Karnieli-Miller et al. (2009), this sometimes seems to contradict qualitative research's methodological and ethical promises. For the scholars (p.285), “The right of participants to play a significant role can lead to the denial of the researcher’s right to intellectual and academic freedom and to an oversimplification of the theoretical construct that can potentially emerge from the research. In the light of these constraints, qualitative research oscillates between the desire to offer a less hierarchical and more reciprocal, transparent framework and the need to respect the theoretical foundations, methodological discipline, and ethical boundaries of qualitative scholarship”.

These debates informed my critical reflection throughout the research about my positionality and how I might reproduce and perpetuate relations of power and subordination over the participants. I had to consider that I was also an ‘outsider’ researcher identified -by the participants- as a white man, representing a historically oppressive group in South Africa. In that sense, it was also beneficial to work collectively and share decision-making with black and white female South African researchers at the UTFS. Especially in strongly racialised intellectual and academic contexts like South Africa, where “intellectual and academic life continues to be structured along racial and gender lines” (Hlatshwayo, 2015, p.143). I also knew these researchers worked for several years in Magangeni informal settlement (see section 4.5). Working with them helped reduce potential upset, as the people who live in the informal settlement already knew them, their background, and their research. I also aimed to introduce myself to the community with a humble attitude, reflecting on my own biases and sources of invisible privilege and being willing to listen and continually learn from the participants of the informal settlement (Minkler, 2004). Likewise, I approached the participants with transparency and clarity about my position and sought out their expectations as a first step in the research process. Consequently, the process of self-reflection allowed me to understand that through participatory action research, I could not eliminate the power inequities within the research relationship but only reduce them (Grant et al., 2008). In that sense, despite inviting three dwellers to work as my co-researchers, it was still me -as the lead researcher- that guided the process.

The data produced in this research was analysed through reflexive thematic analysis to reduce these limitations. Following Braun and Clarke’s six-phase analytical process (2006), this research reflected on key theoretical assumptions the scholars suggest need to be addressed when conducting any form of thematic analysis (Byrne, 2021). Led by a social constructionist epistemology, this research adopted a bidirectional understanding of the relationship between language and communicated experience of the participants (see Chapter IV). In other words, this work understood language as implicit in the social production and reproduction of both meaning and experience. Likewise, to be reflexive, the researcher should reflect on personal attitudes, values, and belief systems and how this influences how we interpret and experience different realities (Chambers, 2012). In this exercise of reflexivity, researchers would draw on the self to generate insights, establish patterns, and bring the voice of their research subject to light (Venkatesh, 2012). Consequently, interrogating the self, the data we employ and the different representations we use would enable us to critically examine power dynamics in the research process (Sultana, 2007)

Another limitation had to do with Covid-19 and its consequent lockdown restrictions. Despite it being an opportunity to readapt my methodology and eventually contribute methodologically to the existing literature of participatory action research, the effects of the pandemic placed limits on the time and the forms of data I had planned to gather for my research. While the adapted methodology allowed three co-researchers to raise relevant research topics and have an active role in producing the data, the process was dependent on the restrictions introduced by the South African government that was very strict during most of 2020. Those same restrictions left me stranded in South Africa for several months, not allowing me to continue the data collection or return to the UK. Consequently, in 2021, when I was writing my analysis in the UK, I was not allowed to return to South Africa and share/discuss the findings with Magangeni informal settlement dwellers due to travel restrictions after a new variant of the pandemic was discovered in South Africa. By then, the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office still advised against all but essential travel to South Africa based on the assessment of Covid-19 risks.

As examined in section 4.3.1, while this thesis planned to seek emancipatory ends for the subalterns, the original objective was hindered by the Covid-19 outbreak. The enforced separation from working with the research participants in the field led to a shift in my approach’s purpose. This shift was towards participation -amplifying the voices of the people less heard and increasing the accountability of those with relatively more power. This explains how the PAR approach I started with changed to an approach where the Participatory part became more prominent than the Action part. However, this challenge also represents an opportunity regarding the way to take this research forward in a practical way.

I argue that the empirical data produced in this research can help policymakers to reflect on the subalterns’ internal stratifications, asymmetries, and heterogeneity, acknowledging the particularities and the different needs they have in the area. Moreover, the research findings might also contribute to having an informal settlement representative in the ward committee. In that sense, policy briefs, bulletins, and blogs could all help to develop the Action part of this research. Other ideas to be discussed with the co-researchers (and with other actors involved in this research) include a photography exhibition (using the photographs the co-researchers took when doing narrative photovoice), and a publication of different life stories of people living in the informal settlement. It is expected that these initiatives can help to recognise and encourage the development of critical knowledge and practical understanding to enable change in Magangeni informal settlement.

Overall, this thesis has intended to provide an insight into organising practices and narratives that are ignored in mainstream western MOS literature and open new spaces to those who have been made voiceless in the knowledge production of these studies in the Global South, namely, the subalterns. In that sense, the participatory approach and co-production of knowledge adopted in this research aimed to reform research practices by strengthening subalterns' voices. By combining different power analysis tools (the power cube framework and the power/interest grid), this thesis also intended to develop more nuanced answers to how and who experiences power at different levels, what kind of power was being exercised, and how actors were enabled or constrained by that power.

Consequently, the tensions and contradictions of the power dynamics of the subalterns’ organising and its heterogeneity examined throughout this work are expected to lead to reconceptualisations that help inform how to understand and enable a more nuanced knowledge about the subalterns and informal organising. The research findings indicate that organisational practices of the subalterns in Magangeni informal settlement are shaped by interrelated power dynamics to which they are exposed -their differences and heterogeneity, the neoliberal world order, and by their immediate needs and the nature of the demands upon them. All these factors are shown to have been aggravated amidst the pandemic of Covid-19 and a fire incident that took place in October 2020. The national lockdown introduced in March 2020 resulted in people of the informal settlement losing their jobs, increased overcrowding and decreased access to basic services, and more cases of gender-based violence. Drawing from these findings, this thesis has aimed to illustrate alternative understandings of informal organising not usually acknowledged in mainstream MOS literature.

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1. The ANC has been the ruling party in South Africa since the end of the Apartheid in 1994. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Later initiatives, such as the “Municipal System Act Number 32 of 2000” (South African Government, 2000) would reinforce the idea of ‘participatory governance’, by encouraging municipalities to create the conditions for local communities to participate in processes such as its integrated development plans (IDPs); the preparation of its annual budget; and strategic decisions relating to the provision of municipal services, among others (Section 16). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. As addressed in the Methodology chapter, self-reflecting on the tensions and limitations of the relationship researcher/researched are essential to avoid perpetuating this representation in asymmetrical terms. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The real names of the informal settlement, the municipality, and the university I worked with have been changed to protect the anonymity of those involved in the research. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The name of the city is not revealed for confidentiality and anonymity reasons. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. The process of writing and reflecting in my diary continued throughout the other two stages of the data collection. The final version of my personal diary had more than 120 pages. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. The names of the informal settlement, its different sections, and the Ward, are pseudonyms and have been changed to protect the anonymity of those involved in the research. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. The names of the project have been changed to protect the anonymity of those involved in the research. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. The national lockdown was only eased on 1 May 2020. The restrictions were lowered to a minimum alert level on 21 September 2020. After a second wave of Covid-19 infections in the country, the South African Government tightens its restrictions again on 29 December 2020. On 17 February 2021, a national Covid-19 vaccination programme was rolled out. As of March 2021, South Africa was back to a minimum alert level easing most of the lockdown restrictions. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. A five-level COVID-19 alert system was introduced to manage a gradual easing of the lockdown in South Africa. This risk-adjusted approach was guided by several criteria, including the level of infections and rate of transmission, the capacity of health facilities, the extent of the implementation of public health interventions and the economic and social impact of continued restrictions. While Alert Level 5 indicated high Covid-19 spread with a low health system readiness, Alert Level 1 indicated low Covid-19 spread with high health system readiness. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. He refers to the Special Covid-19 Social Relief of Distress Grant, which offered 350 Rands per month (approximately 18 British sterling pounds), for a maximum of six months from the day it was approved. It was offered by the South African Social Security Agency (SASSA), for those over 18 years old, unemployed, and who were not receiving any other subsidy from the government (South African Government, 2021)] [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. SASSA offers the following grants “to help improve standards of living in society and are given to people who are vulnerable to poverty and in need of state support”: grant for older person, disability grant, war veterans grant, care dependency grant, foster child grant, child support grant, and the social relief of distress grant (South African Social Security Agency, 2021). [↑](#footnote-ref-12)