CHAPTER 6

Local government as the stage for resistance: Strategies and tactics of opposing mega projects in the city of Johannesburg

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Introduction

In 2014, the Minister for Human Settlements Lindiwe Sisulu launched a new policy direction for the development of human settlements (Ballard & Rubin 2017). The minister said '[w]e need to move from small projects of 200 houses to mega projects of integrated housing mix to cater for different incomes and needs' (quoted in Petterson 2014). Sisulu noted that the Department of Human Settlements would spend 100 days identifying 50 National Priority Projects which would become mega human settlements each one a minimum of 10 000 units (Merten 2014). The call was subsequently taken up by Gauteng's premier and MEC Jacob Mamabolo (2015) with the announcement of the construction of new towns, catering for over 60 000 households: 'In this new vision, we stated two objectives notably, building post-apartheid cities, secondly, completing current legacy projects, or RDP housing development trajectory.'

Provincial Human Settlements officials were alarmed by the announcement: the drive from a national level of the state to institute and push a local project contravened provincial and municipal plans, and long-term projects. These national visions were generally not shared by the 'street-level bureaucrats' tasked with carrying them out. However, despite voicing their concerns to their seniors, officials did not gain any traction and sought ways to deal with this national interference into the local realm.

The following chapter intends to operate on a number of scales: it briefly examines the manner in which the national, in this case embodied by South Africa's National Department of Human Settlements (NDHS), sought to entrench its specific visions

in the local. The core focus though is the sets of practices and micro-practices; 'tactics' and weapons that generally low-level or less politically powerful bureaucrats and officials utilised to fend off nationally imposed policies and approaches. These can be conceptualised as the weapons of 'the weak' against 'the strong' (Scott 1985) using the tactics of the *other* (De Certeau 1984). The end result was not a complete 'win' or 'loss' but a set of compromises that make for an unevenly implemented set of policies and practices. The cases open up how and by what forces cities and urban spaces are shaped, the contradictions and contestations that occur within the edifice of 'the state' and how these then become manifest in the cityscape (Hornby et al. 2017).

Beyond the edifice: Inside the bureaucracy

The work of administration takes place in the fluorescent-lit rooms of drab office buildings where thousands of bureaucrats type streams of information into outdated computers or file handwritten notes in inaccessible archives. From all appearances, this is not an arena of political action at all. Bureaucracy ... obviates individual agency. The humanness of the human condition gets lost in the files, the halls, the shufflings of bureaucratic administration. (Bernstein & Mertz 2011: 6–7)

But it is within these drab shufflings that, if cities are not made, they are certainly influenced. In the hundreds of decisions made by these gods of small things that laminate over time into the materialities of urban spaces. This section assists in chipping away at the 'edifice,' presenting the humanity of bureaucrats and moments of interface and contestation that exist between levels of government and the networks of formal and informal relationships which operate within the state.

Bureaucracies have terrible reputations and have borne the brunt of the critique; caught between a Weberian sense that 'the professional bureaucrat is chained to his activity by his entire material and ideal existence. In the great majority of cases, he is only a single cog in an ever-moving mechanism which prescribes to him an essentially fixed route of march' (Gerth & Mills 1991: 228). In such thinking, bureaucrats lacked agency or even thought and the state was caricatured as a 'vending machine' in which money and resources went in, and through a set of standardised machinery, an assembly line solution produced following the rules of standard procedure (Chipkin 2011). Alternatively, when agency was allowed '[b]ureaucrats at such institutions embod[ied] the spirit of this unpredictable and liminal creature. They [we]re at once inanimate – lazy automatons, blindly serving larger powers – and animate – nefarious, self-interested obstructionists' (Hoag 2011: 82).

However, beginning in the late 1960s a different and more human view was proposed. Lipsky (1969) posited the street-level bureaucrat who questioned whether officials' 'actions in determining whether or not to provide services [operated] according to laws, regulations, and professional norms' (Hoag 2011: 84). Lipsky (1969) saw that bureaucrats were often at the mercy of intersecting forces: political and hierarchical pressure from those above, community groups and social connections, and their own prejudices, politics and sympathies. More recent work takes its inspiration from gender studies and intersectionality based on Haraway and others who reject the

idea of a neutral 'cog' in a bureaucratic wheel and 'reclaims vision as an embodied practice, reminding us that all gazes are from somewhere, and a specifically material somewhere' (Lipsky 1969).

As a consequence, daily practices and everyday lives and decisions that constitute the activities of bureaucrats has become an increasing field of interest. How bureaucrats make decisions, their reasons for assigning or not assigning resources, their discretion have been the subject of ethnographic work, examining the sets of social rules that govern exchanges and make them possible. The relationships that exist between 'the public' and the bureaucrats has also become a fertile area of study, particularly in the context of the Global South, where Chatterjee identified 'political society' and the need for platforms of engagement due to the illegality or extra legality of certain urban actors. Where local 'big men' act as mediators on behalf of groups who otherwise would not be able to access the official mechanisms of the state (Chatterjee 2004). Others have noted the informal or so-called 'rude' forms of accountability which, through shame and embarrassment, pressures to maintain reputation and status, and the threat of violence force action and service delivery (Hossain 2010); as well as the institutional structures, which allow front-line bureaucrats to evade responsibility (Chatterjee 2012). Much of the work has focused on the more negative aspects of the bureaucracy and the blame for the failure of state policies. There are fewer attempts which examine the 'will to improve' (Li 2007), and note the 'best intentions' of bureaucrats or take less normative stances, attempting to understand the informal practices of the state at the micro-level. These are attempts to understand the interface between the state and its client, customers and citizens: the state's public guise as it faces outwards.

There is also a burgeoning literature that looks at some aspects of the inward gaze, however, here too it is dominated by more negative accounts with much of the work examining various iterations of corruption. There is a focus in postcolonial and post-communist states on the force of corruption as a driver and shaper of the bureaucracy and its daily function: pointing out the institutional design of bureaucracies to enhance and support lines of personal gain and political patronage (Golden 2003), or the 'politicization of the ministerial bureaucracy to the desire of governing parties to enhance their political control over the formulation and implementation of public policies' (Meyer-Sahling 2006: 274). In general, there is the sense that '[t]he institutional legacies of a relatively weak state, coupled with the emergence of resource-poor and power-hungry political parties, have historically provided a fertile ground for the emergence of patronage politics in many areas of the world' (Bratton & Van de Walle 1997). In Africa, a disturbing line of argument is that 'the state' is a 'pseudo-Western façade' which is still largely captured by society and politics (Chabal & Daloz 1999: 9–16). As such, the state operates within the coils of 'personalised' and 'particularised' relationships with the political and social.

In South African literature authors such as Chipkin (2011, 2013), have taken the bureaucracy as an object of study; Cameron (1996, 2005, 2014) attempting to clarify institutional and structural aspects of the post-apartheid government, and Benit-Gbaffou (2007, 2008) has looked at the interface between the state and modes of engagement. All of which are useful, but it is to Von Holdt (2010) that I turn as he has complexified and unpacked patronage in the South African context, where policies of affirmative action and a culture of deference, coupled with a skills shortage 'generat[e]

a powerful culture of moving onwards and upwards' and 'encourages a culture of facing upwards' rather than outwards towards the sites and interfaces of engagement with the public. As a consequence, civil servants are removed from on-the-ground engagement, leading to what is often called 'poor service delivery.'

Facing upwards is not the only way of examining the hierarchy, and urban theorists note that there is no automatic acceptance of national policies into local and daily practice, rather accomplishing such a feat requires the acceptance, and validation of those who need to implement it (Buitelaar, Galle & Sorel 2011). Such acceptance and internalisation is also at the mercy of the informal networks and local cultures that exist. Veron et al. (2003) noted these dissonances in India's bureaucratic architecture, explaining that the lack of validation is driven, at least in part, by the stark contrasts between the levels of government and also the class and educational gaps between the various bureaucrats within the state.

This begins to shed light into the vast differences between those who promulgate policies and regulations and those who implement them. It is into this gap that the following case steps, acknowledging that bureaucracies are key sites of city-making, and that they are not homogenous monoliths, but are comprised of people with their own gaze, histories and politics, much of which is not political or necessarily self-seeking but may come from an opposing or different set of rationalities (Watson 2003). It is these differences, both in vision and position, which act as 'obstacles' to the institutionalisation of national policy (Buitelaar et al. 2011). However, what has been less explored are the mechanisms and modes of contestation within the state through which rebellion occurs. The following sections offer a non-normative account of some of these methods, beginning with an explanation of the national/local contexts and followed by a discussion of the modes and repertoires of contestation.

The national vision in the local sphere: Long-term trajectories

The mega project or mega human settlement vision was first espoused by Minister Sisulu in her 2014 Budget speech:

MinMec have decided that we will now embark on mega projects, because in this way the economies of scale will be in our favour. In these mega projects there will be a collaboration of all three spheres of government. Local government will ultimately inherit the projects once completed.

In addition, the aim was not only to build new, post-apartheid cities, but to also address issues of poverty, inequality and informality that seemed to be plaguing existing cities and which had been obdurate and unyielding in the face of numerous state attempts (Ballard & Rubin 2017). The idea was that the new cities would somehow stimulate economic growth, offering economic activities and employment, along with a full range of services and facilities. They should also include a range of income groups, moving beyond the current perpetuation of segregated development in these terms (Harrison & Todes 2017: 32–33).

In October 2014, following the initial announcement, the Department of Human Settlements hosted a Housing Indaba. A key moment at the indaba was the unveiling

of a social contract which required signatories to commit to '[b]uild 50 catalytic projects and install basic services in all developing towns including revitalising mining towns.' It was apparently also at the indaba that the minister called on all spheres of government and the private sector to submit lists of potential mega projects to national for their consideration.

What followed was a scramble by various departments to support this new policy direction, which in many ways came out of the blue. This is apparently quite normal for South African policy-making: '[This] is a classic case: which is ... the political announcement is made first, and then go in and do this' (Narsoom 2016). As such, the Housing Development Agency (HDA) was tasked with making the policy direction viable; a difficult task, since there was 'No consultation initially and although projects were supposed to be decided with relevant local authorities, it was realistically left to the HDA to scramble to devise a process for assessment that could be used to select the relevant projects' (Anonymous HDA officials 1 and 2, 2016). Furthermore, according to an Ekurhuleni Official: 'Private sector developers submitted directly to national without coming via local or provincial,' circumventing local planning processes. This left the HDA in a very awkward position, 'It's very difficult to go back on a political decision or political announcement ... how do we almost manage this, what's the word I'm looking for, ameliorate sort of ... and it's me thinking with my bureaucratic hat, "oh god this is a disaster how do we fix it up without allowing anybody to have their noses out of joint?"' (Anonymous 3, 2016).

Thus, the HDA was left to devise a process that appeared to legitimate a new set of spatial interventions that circumvented all of the planning legislation and effectively stamped the authority of national on to the local sphere. Also ignored by both national and provincial authorities was the fact that this form of sprawl flew in the face of years of work by the larger metros who had dedicated time and effort to legislating more compact, denser cities, structured along transit-orientated development principles. All of which was disregarded in favour of a model that promoted sprawled urbanisation across the province.

The ministerial pronouncements were taken by officials at all levels, that mega projects would be the new direction of the various Departments of Human Settlements. In Gauteng, the policy was picked up with alacrity and by April 2015, Gauteng launched its own mega projects policy with some of its own provincial ideals. It was argued that the proposed new fully functional mixed income, mixed use towns, built outside of existing cities would effectively deal with the wicked and entrenched issues of apartheid spatial planning, and provide much needed economic impetus to the stagnating provincial economies. Mega projects also satisfied a political agenda, with a premier and high-level ANC officials who wanted recognition for contributing to a radical, transformative project leading up to the ANC's policy conference, scheduled for December 2017.

In some ways, such practice should also be seen within its most recent historical context. After the democratic transition of South Africa in 1994, there was a long-term sustained project to decentralise powers and responsibilities to the local sphere. The South African Constitution clearly designated a number of mandates to local government: planning, land management and infrastructure development. The Constitution also designates three cooperative but autonomous spheres of

government, where there are moments of conjoined and independent responsibility. Despite the protections offered by the Constitution, national government has consistently interfered in the operations of municipal government, often seeing it as nothing more than the service delivery arm (Steytler 2005). A number of both overt and subversive strategies have been undertaken in attempts to pull local government back into the central fold (Moya 2008). Moya's (2008) analysis of five dimensions of recentralisation including fiscal and policy-making autonomy, Kroukamp's (2008) examination of the attempted implementation of the Single Public Service Bill as an outright attempt to regain control over the municipalities, whilst Cameron's (2014) analysis of the acts of subversion in the Western Cape all illustrate the strong and indomitable will of the national government's attempts to maintain control over municipalities, especially those wayward enough to elect other parties.

There were also global forces and national political intentions at work. In the South African context, the last few years have seen a loss of legitimacy of the African National Congress on the national and international stage. The allegations of corruption and charges of misconduct against the top leadership have tainted the country's reputation and large infrastructural projects are loaded with political symbolism, intended to 'demonstrate national technological prowess' (Van der Westhuizen 2007: 335). Mega projects, which have generally been constructed within cities, have been used to signify rebranding of cities, making them more attractive and competitive to elite residents and international capital (Hannan & Sutherland 2015). At the same time, there has been a move towards 'new cities' or cities from scratch across the globe. These are often private sector-led housing projects, located on the urban peripheries of existing cities (Herbert & Murray 2015). Cairo, Moscow, Lagos and Nairobi, to name a few, have designed and committed to this urban form, largely leaving the issues of the past behind in the hope of rebranding and marketing these cities locally and internationally.

Thus the implementation of the mega projects vision, initiated by national government and pushed by provincial elites, can be read in light of the longer trajectory of national interference into the urban space and part of an ongoing battle between national, provincial and local structures over land and cities as the powerbases and vote-banks of the major political parties. It was also a political move intended to demonstrate effectiveness and capacity delivery (Ballard & Rubin 2018) and the ability to compete in the international arena. Thus, the timing of the mega projects approach was hardly coincidental since it occurred in the run-up to local elections and the party conference which took place in 2016. With some commentators arguing that prescience born of extensive political astuteness, the mega projects approach was a last ditch attempt by national government to gain control over urban space before it lost the major metros in the next election and appeal more broadly to a disillusioned and disaffected urban constituency.

Nevertheless, local or provincial government officials did not simply take on the national vision. It was within this milieu, where elites were not paying attention to either the procedural deficits of the approach or critiques of the content, that officials began to find ways of contesting the process through various means.

Strategies and tactics: Weapons of the weak

There are two main lines of analytical framing, and one minor one, that become useful when looking at the response and behaviour of state officials. The first originates with De Certeau (1984) who argued that the city was constituted by the strategies of city producers, the state, the government, business and other institutions. It is through these strategies that bounded, codified and ruled space is constructed and dominated. Maps, laws, regulations, and grids constitute the mechanisms and controls of space through which a powerful elite hold on to and pursue power (Jessop 1997). Strategies are used by those within organisational power structures, whether small or large, such as the state or municipality, the corporation or the proprietor, a scientific enterprise or the scientist. Strategies are deployed against some external entity to institute a set of relations for official adversaries, competitors, clients, customers, or simply subjects (Blauvelt 2003). However, everyday practice usurps, contests and destabilises these strategies through the tactics of the *other*, the subaltern and the non-powerful (Mould 2014):

The place of the tactic belongs to the other. A tactic insinuates itself into the other's place, fragmentarily, without taking over in its entirety, without being able to keep it at a distance. It has at its disposal no base where it can capitalize on its advantages, prepare its expansions, and secure independence with respect to circumstances. (De Certeau 1984: xix)

Scott's (1985) work speaks to the 'subtle but powerful forms of "everyday resistance"', not the grand gestures of coups and rebellion, but the small ways in which the less powerful respond to and contest domination. Scott (1985) importantly identifies non-cooperation, 'foot-dragging, evasion, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander and sabotage' as the everyday counter-hegemonic acts of the 'weak' against the 'strong'.

There is a point of divergence that the following cases surface: both De Certeau (1984) and Scott (1985) conceptualised the state as 'strong,' the entity against which tactics and weapons of the weak are deployed. However, as discussed earlier, 'the state' is no monolith but is comprised of institutional, personal and professional relations, often operating in concert, collusion and just as often in contestation, contradiction and working at cross-purposes. Furthermore, 'the state' does not embody merely one political group, one class of employees or even one unified ideology. It is a very human machine with all of the whims, quirks, prejudices and faults that typify the vast majority of everyday interaction. Given the above then, it can be seen how within departments, between hierarchies and across departments, particular groups of officials may not and do not approve of or embed the status quo and actively find ways to protest and rebel.

In the cases that are described in the next few sections, relatively less powerful officials within the state hierarchy protest against powerful politicians and political forces. In such cases, direct confrontation and open disobedience are simply not options, both because they are not sufficiently powerful to be paid attention to and also because many of the officials are life-time civil servants. As Von Holdt (2010) has pointed out in the South African context, becoming a civil servant is a potential road to

social mobility and is a long-term commitment. Given the highly hierarchical nature of the South African bureaucracy and its close ties to party politics, open protest and confrontation could be a career limiting move. Thus, as Hull (2003), pointed to in other contexts, there is the need for 'the erasure game that is required: bureaucracies generate collective agency, but it is achieved paradoxically through the elaborately detailed individuation of action, and bureaucrats' professional survival relies on their careful and continual eschewal of authorship' (Hoag 2011: 82).

As such, officials need to find modes of protest that are at once covert, and untraceable but more effective than direct and open hostilities. The advantage of these means of resistance is that they 'require little or no coordination or planning; they often represent a form of individual self-help; and they typically avoid any direct symbolic confrontation with authority or with elite norms' (Scott 1985: 29). These are the tactics of the *other* within the state and, as will be seen, comprise a repertoire of action and inaction that is generally ascribed to non-state actors.

There is also an important point of convergence with Scott's (1985) work on poorer communities and De Certeau's (1984) on the subaltern, which is the response by the strong. In both framings, the 'strong' are neither idle nor unresponsive, they too find ways to adapt, respond and push back: varying from violence to the incorporation and adaptation of the counter-hegemonic ideas for coercion and securing agreement.

Provincial officials: Passive-aggressive behaviours

In Gauteng province, officials in one of the units of the Departments of Human Settlements, protested the planned mega projects but the politicians and senior officials were apparently not listening. Possibly driven by political ambitions, senior figures 'might have ... rallied behind the issue ... since government came in place they have not created any cities ... we've been in power for 20 odd years but ... we can't show a city that we have created ...' (Anonymous provincial official 5, 2016). As such, there was pressure that the public 'should see the fruits of this, in this current political term' (Anonymous provincial official 5, 2016).

These provincial officials had been working on spatial change in the province, looking to increase the number of units delivered but as one official put it 'our goal should be compacting cities' (Anonymous provincial official 2, 2016). The officials were also concerned about the feasibility of the mega projects policy direction. As the implementing agents, they wondered how such a project could ever be made a reality, noting concerns around scale and 'the challenge of giving massive numbers to one contractor is what if there happens to be hiccups in that, [...] on that site' (Anonymous provincial official 3, 2016). As well as the lack of sufficient funding 'policy implementation will have to shift, we should not be talking about USDG [Urban Settlements Development Grant] and HSDG [Human Settlements Development Grant] alone because that will not be sufficient in building the kind of ideology that you're looking for' (Anonymous provincial official 4, 2016).

Their fears were not addressed, so they came to Professor Philip Harrison's research chair in Spatial Analysis and City Planning (SA&CP) at the University of the Witwatersrand which has strong connections, personal and professional, to many of the officials. Although the provincial team had been asked to work on a mega projects

document, which they duly did, the project was eventually handed over to a service provider who, together with the MEC, produced the final document and they had a number of anxieties over the new document. The requests were simple:

Could we assist with the construction of a 'neutral' space in which to raise concerns and demonstrate that there were strong empirical arguments for why mega projects were a bad idea?

The team leader worried that 'there were so many things ... which were basically cut and paste from somewhere else' (Anonymous provincial official 3, 2016). The new document raised concerns that, 'The modelling of the cities was based on some picture that was taken from China or somewhere' and had no basis in the actual infrastructure layout of the province and did not access the repository of information that the officials had access to and used in their work. Effectively, their expertise and their knowledge were sidelined. Furthermore, they were also left in a more awkward position: 'How do you critique what you initially conceptualised?' (Anonymous provincial official 4, 2016). The officials were also keenly aware that the process had been top-down and that 'for municipalities ... not to be in [on it from] the beginning ... was an oversight, especially, knowing, we [provincial government] are going to *their* spaces to build' (Anonymous provincial official 4, 2016).

It was being caught in this bind that also inspired the officials to approach Wits University to host an event, invite municipalities and metros so that they could also voice their concerns. The idea was to invite the relevant politicians and officials to ensure that they heard all the parties. We were also asked for any readings, research or materials that could be shared to help them with their internal briefs. These actions were motivated by trying to bring the status of the university to bear, to ask for an external voice, something driven by both research and 'science' to get through to those in power. Officials clearly recognised and had previous experience of engagement with academics and their so-called 'authority,' recalling an event where the MEC had had a conversation with Professor Harrison which had helped to shift some of the MEC's thinking: 'And he [the MEC] was keen on engaging on that because, cause remember how Phil [Harrison] gave him information, the information he could have gotten inside from us ... [but] when he hears it outside he's like wow!' which does imply that coming to our specific unit also was no accident.

A workshop with a combination of leading 'experts' and officials was planned for engagement between the various units in the provincial department, a way to get the senior officials to listen and a channel to allow municipal officials to share their thoughts, since they had not been consulted. The workshop went ahead but at the eleventh hour, the senior politicians declined and did not attend, leaving the platform in some ways as a proverbial case of preaching to the choir. However, a conversation began where local authorities voiced their disenchantment: 'If Gauteng Province seeks to pursue a model which promotes dispersion, while underpinning metropolitan municipalities are pursuing compaction, there's a problem with this and we do have to align it.' And arguing that there is a need to continue to engage with the MEC, 'So I think it's more important to engage with him to kind of lower expectations around this agenda (CoJ official 2016).

Following the meeting, it was agreed that there could be a set of actions undertaken by Wits University, the Gauteng City Regional Observatory (GCRO) and provincial officials: (1) another colloquium organised by the Provincial Department of Human Settlements similar to the first one but this time more specifically focused on municipal engagement, (2) a city lab organised by the GCRO, as well as using a MEC-MMC forum (IGR), both technical and political meetings, as sites of engagement. The provincial officials also continued with what may be termed a low-level set of activities: writing memos, preparing research and asking the academy for opinion-editorials and material to support their protests against mega projects. Their tactic seemed to be one of utilising empirical findings, and fact-based analysis to contest rhetoric and political force.

However, most of these activities were halted when the key figure in the provincial department was mysteriously seconded to another province, officials noted 'since he left then it was, like, this dialogue just died' (Anonymous provincial official 4, 2016); a move that was apparently in the works for quite some time but was suspicious in its timing. It did mean that the unit leading the charge was left without a head. Almost simultaneously, other members of the project management team were moved to regional offices with new mandates. These transfers served to successfully intimidate some of the staff who were critical of the new policy direction. It was also at this point that officials became slightly more cautious and began to speak about how their engagement with the researchers, was really about 'looking at the core concept [mega projects] critically and ... trying to actually enhance it and make sure that it succeeds' (Anonymous provincial official 4, 2016).

Contesting and cattle-trading: The City of Johannesburg (CoJ)'s response

A key concern voiced by the provincial officials was the lack of consultation, and the 'top-down' nature of the new policy, which was also an area of frustration for the metros. The CoJ engaged in two courses of action. Both of which were relatively more confrontational: they continued to argue against mega projects within the internal and regular meetings that are a part of the normal cycle of engagement between the province and the metros. Also, instead of attempting to wrangle with the provincial department of human settlements, where they apparently were having no effect, they engaged with the provincial planning department with whom they shared a longstanding and collegial relationship. The stakes were high for the city and were both specific and principled: the specific stakes were around particular projects and sites that the CoJ objected to, amongst them were Syferfontein, and Lanseria, both of which are far outside of the areas designated for development. The related matter was the CoJ's principled stance on development: the promotion of densification and compaction along transit-orientated routes, and within specified nodes, to curtail sprawl and redevelop parts of the city. Mega projects as a directive contradicted all of these approaches.

The interaction with the provincial planning authorities was broader than just about mega projects and included ensuring coherence between the key planning documents such as the spatial development frameworks. The documents were duly aligned and, given that the Spatial Development Framework (SDF) is supposed to be

the overarching framework of spatial development, the presumption was that most of the mega project ideas would be quashed. However, this was not to be.

Feigned compliance: Ekurhuleni

The Ekurhuleni Metropolitan Municipality (EMM) took a very different approach: that of feigned compliance. The geography of the municipality is highly dispersed, comprised of a number of old town centres that are separate and spread out. The idea of another new town or towns within this area was simply untenable. However, instead of directly confronting the province or national government, the officials apparently agreed to the policy by stating that there was 'a council resolution in support of mega projects.' But then they 're-packaged' a number of smaller, infill projects, into so-called mega projects, noting 'we didn't want to submit too many projects so we aggregated 16 projects into 3: northern cluster, eastern cluster and southern' (Anonymous EMM official 1, 2016).

Using some very ingenious political thinking, they noted, 'There is still no clear distinction between mega projects and catalytic and we are for both. We have clustered projects. We have 9 towns and 9 townships. Lots of buffer in between. If we keep on looking for land on the urban edges there (will be) no services or social facilities. So, we are looking inside. They are both mega and catalytic' (Anonymous EMM official 2, 2016). The EMM have cleverly adopted the language of national but continued with their own spatial plans.

Conclusion: The successes of the tactical deployment of weapons of the weak

The cases analysed in this chapter demonstrate three modes of contestation: provincial officials began with direct engagement but after its failure used the research unit at Wits SA&CP as mediator in order to mobilise the status of experts, scientific knowledge and empirical evidence to counter political rhetoric. However, the success of such a strategy seems very limited with most of the 'rebel leaders' being transferred and senior figures still determined to continue with the policy direction. The CoJ, which also began with direct confrontation ended with circumvention, found some success and some compromise: it would seem that the Departments of Human Settlements found ways to get round their objection to Syferfontein, by simply excluding Johannesburg from the decision-making cluster around projects in the province, despite the fact that it is Johannesburg's land. There is also speculation that there was some cattle trading and CoJ agreed to other projects if the province would support another version of urban renewal in Alexandria. Finally, EMM 'feigned compliance' which seems to have garnered the greatest success. At the time of writing, the mega projects list to be approved included all three of the projects that EMM proposed. Instead of engaging in confrontation, EMM officials chose their moments, found collaborators and mediators to act as their mouthpieces, used alternative paths, circumvented processes and feigned compliance to use the rules of the game against those in power. Taken together these demonstrate the weapons of the weak within the state. While their success was mixed, it is also clear that the national government

responded. It removed people, transferred them and thus intimidated the rest of the teams, dragged its feet, utilised opaque processes and finally compromised.

There have been subsequent changes to the list of approved projects and mega projects are now referred to as Priority Human Settlements and Housing Development Areas or PHSHDAs. The latest list, revealed in May 2020, shows a number of projects that are neither mega nor new and seem to indicate there have been more backroom negotiations and debates since the original research was commissioned. However, these PHSHDAs are still seen as vitally important to the National Human Settlement's strategy and will receive a significant portion of national funding and attention over the next few years (Business Insider 2020). This very top-down approach, is also in direct contravention with the more 'bottom-up' approaches of *in situ* upgrading in informal settlements and other resident-led modes that have also been encouraged by national government and will no doubt lead to further contestation and conflict within the state and with its stakeholders over the next few years.

These narratives demonstrate how contested a terrain the state actually is. Although the national government's vision is powerful and is being pushed into the realms of the local it is not uncontested. Despite the power, violence and authority of national government elites, local actors push back, using the weapons at their disposal and the politics of the *other* to reshape policy tools and intents. As such, the city landscape becomes a compromise influenced as much by the powerful, obvious agendas of the strong as the subtle tactical deployment of the weapons of the weak.

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