Waiting for the state: a politics of housing in South Africa

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Abstract. Although specified in the South African Bill of Rights, for the majority of South African citizens the right to access housing translates in practice to the experience of waiting. In this paper we reflect on the micropolitics of waiting, practices of quiet encroachment, exploring how and where citizens wait and make do, and their encounters with the state in these processes. We argue that waiting for homes shapes a politics of finding shelter in the meanwhile partially visible yet precarious, the grey spaces of informality and illegality that constitute South African cities. At the same time, waiting generates a politics of encounter between citizen and state, practices immersed in shifting policy approaches and techniques, the contingent and often-opaque practices of governance. In sum, the politics of waiting for housing in South Africa proves paradoxical: citizens are marked as legitimate wards of the state. Yet, to live in the meanwhile and in the long term requires subversion, an agency that is sometimes visible in mobilisation and protest, and at other times out of sight, simultaneously contentious and legitimate.

Keywords: waiting, low-cost housing, nonmovements, ordinary encroachments, South Africa

Introduction

Waiting in a backyard shack, in the neighbourhood informal settlement, passing years in an already overcrowded home, 'temporarily' in the household, a perpetual child, registered on a housing waiting list, a ward of the state. Yiftachel calls these states "permanent temporariness" (2009a); Jeffrey, modalities of "being in the middle", in limbo (2010, page 97). Auyero characterises this type of waiting as "uncertainty and arbitrariness … dominated by persistent confusion and misunderstanding" (2012, page 72).

Across South African cities, waiting for state-provided homes is normal, a taken-for-granted, everyday, intergenerational condition. Although it can take decades, people continue to wait, to hope for, and to expect a formal house. Registering and then waiting to become a beneficiary of a house funded and built by the state persists as common sense, a logical strategy. Based on the legal specification that housing is a basic need, enshrined in the Bill of Rights (1996) and the Housing Act of 1997 (Huchzermeyer, 2001), all South Africans are entitled to "have access to adequate housing" (Republic of South Africa, quoted in Huchzermeyer, 2001, page 305; see also Chenwi, 2008).[1] Symbolic of democracy, housing has been promised since the end of apartheid, a commitment renewed every electoral cycle. This context has shaped the South African state's mass roll-out of low-income housing, over

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[1] To qualify for housing, you must meet income, citizenship, and age criteria, and not have accessed state assistance for homeownership at any stage in the past, processes discussed in the body of this paper.

three million units to date (National Planning Commission, 2012, page 268), for those still waiting concrete evidence that patience might pay off.

Nonetheless, for the majority of citizens, this right to access housing translates in practice to the experience of waiting. Enabled through the socioeconomic rights specified in the Constitution, waiting for the state is both normalised and legitimate. As a process and a politics, it shapes citizen encounters with the state in banal and profound ways. On the one hand, waiting highlights the centrality of the state. It requires applicants to be present and accountable, actively registered on housing databases ('waiting lists', as they were previously known officially, and still are referred to colloquially), part of the state's project after apartheid. On the other hand, at the individual level, the often illegal situations in which people live while waiting have to be masked. Waiting requires persisting in informal settlements and backyards, "quiet encroachments" (Bayat, 2010) that are overlooked by the state and that side step planning rules and procedures (Ballard, 2014). Yiftachel describes this terrain as "gray", "developments, enclaves, populations and transactions [are] positioned between the 'lightness' of legality/approval/safety and the 'darkness' of eviction/destruction/ death" (2009b, page 243). Waiting is situated in this terrain; both legitimate and contentious, legal and illegal, it shapes encounters between citizens and the state.

Across the poorer and working-class majorities of South African cities, individuals and families wait in informal settlements, backyards, and hostels, in overcrowded public and private housing. Much scholarly and popular attention has been paid to housing as key to the substantiation of citizenship (see Miraftab, 2006; Robins, 2010)[2] and to the ways in which social movement and community-based mobilisation have been drawn on to access housing in postapartheid South Africa (see, among others, Charlton and Kihato, 2006; Huchzermeyer, 2003; Oldfield and Stokke, 2007; Tomlinson, 2006). While critical, we focus here instead on the unorganised, rather than coordinated, and individual, rather than collective, politics of waiting for homes: what Bayat incisively describes as "nonmovements", embodied in "the shared practices of large numbers of ordinary people" (2010, page 14).

To ground this reflection in the everyday micropolitics of waiting, in this paper we draw on qualitative research[3] completed in a neighbourhood built as an apartheid-era segregated 'coloured' (mixed-race)[4] Group Area. Fifteen kilometres from the Cape Town city centre, this neighbourhood includes public rental housing, backyard shacks, and two informal settlements built in the 2000s by residents as a response to serious overcrowding. As a result of a protracted court case to assess the legality of the first informal settlement, a new housing project has been planned and approved for the neighbourhood. The project will provide just under eight hundred houses for homeless families in the neighbourhood and the surrounding area. The selection of beneficiaries and the public viewing of the beneficiary lists in late 2012 have made the possibility of access to a formal home concrete

[2] Mobilising for citizenship rights has been an important focus of action and analysis in relation to social movements in postapartheid South Africa. While an important angle of analysis, this is not the focal point of our paper and argument here.

[3] Twenty-four qualitative, open-ended, in-depth interviews were conducted with residents between 2011 and 2012. Key themes that were explored in these interviews included the housing histories of participants; the neighbourhood and how it has changed over the years; the processes of application for housing; current housing situations and their challenges; what waiting feels like and what it means; interactions with the local housing officials; perceptions of government as well as hopes for the future. Three interviews were conducted with officials who work or have worked in local government and the housing sector. In addition to these interviews, a household-by-household 'block' survey (twenty-one short interviews) was conducted to corroborate information provided in the in-depth interviews.

[4] Use of the racial term 'coloured' reflects apartheid-era classification, categories used legally to implement segregation of neighbourhoods and other public resources and spaces. Although no longer legal, this descriptor persists.

and the politics of waiting more readily visible in this area. This neighbourhood and the Cape Town context allow us to usefully theorise waiting and its consequences more generally. We use this material to explore the modalities of waiting: how and where citizens wait and make do, what they do to live in limbo in the meanwhile, and their encounters with the state in these processes. It is through and in these temporalities, spaces, and strategies that citizens both invoke and ignore the state in struggles to secure and gain a permanent formal home.

Building on a relatively recent interest in waiting as an analytical terrain in which to reflect on postcolonial states, we argue that waiting for homes is significant in South Africa in three ways. It shapes a politics of quiet encroachment 'in the meanwhile', finding shelter in informal settlements and backyards, partially visible yet precarious, the grey spaces of informality and illegality that constitute South African cities. Waiting also generates a politics of encounter, in which citizens sidestep and bypass, as well as try to make legible and reason with, city housing officials and the policies that govern officials' conduct, acts immersed in shifting policy approaches and techniques, the contingent and often-opaque practices of the state. And, third, waiting for housing is a process that, in mundane and profound, short-term and life-long registers, shapes what it demands and means to claim rights and citizenship after apartheid. A form of "temporal and social suffering" that is both "purposeful and purposeless", as Jeffrey suggests (2010, page 91), the politics of waiting for housing in South Africa proves paradoxical: citizens consider themselves responsibilities of the state, yet to live in the short and long term demands subversion, a provisional agency, more often than not out of sight, simultaneously contentious and legitimate.

Modalities of waiting

For many families, formal housing is spoken of as a dream, a vision in the future, one mired, however, in the realities of waiting and the ever-present struggle to access shelter in 'the meanwhile'. Officially in Cape Town, 280 000, more than a quarter of Cape Town's households, are registered on the city's integrated housing database[5], the formal channel through which low-income citizens are recognised as waiting to access housing from the state. For many, if not most, this process is the only legal way to obtain a formal house. In a context in which the state funds and manages the building of around 8500 housing units annually in Cape Town (City of Cape Town, 2010, page 12), options for shelter while waiting are limited and often precarious. They include: living in overcrowded conditions with family members in rented accommodation; living in a backyard shack of a rented house, paying a rental fee for a space to erect a shack and sharing bathroom facilities with the household—sometimes family, other times a landlord; and erecting shelter in an informal settlement, which may or may not be legal with some services and infrastructure in place. These practices are what Bayat describes as "quiet encroachment":

> "noncollective but prolonged direct actions of dispersed individuals and families to acquire the basic necessities of their lives (land for shelter, urban collective consumption or urban services, informal work, business opportunities, and public space) in a quiet and unassuming illegal fashion" (2010, page 45).

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[5] This is the number that appears on the City of Cape Town's Housing Database website (see https://www.capetown.gov.za/en/Housing/Pages/Housinglist.aspx), although the number of households waiting for applications is often contested. A City of Cape Town publication estimated that there were 400 000 households waiting for housing opportunities (2010, page 11). This number was corroborated through a pilot programme to consolidate all the waiting lists that existed in the Cape Town region (see Tissington et al, 2013, page 30).

Yet, waiting reflects more than a technical (legal or illegal) status. A lack of permanence or security of tenure, a "permanent temporariness" (Yiftachel, 2009a) and that shapes daily struggles, what we call here the 'modalities of waiting'.

Waiting in the long term, for instance, brings multiple generations under a single roof. A mother who lives with her children in her parents' house explains what this means for her:

"I will remain a child in the house because I'm still living with my parents. You see? You have to obey the rules and the children have to obey your rules and their rules .… Children, they grow up and they want their own privacy" (23 August 2011).

Currently living in her late mother's house, the tenancy of which is disputed, another woman explains the demands of waiting:

"[T]o stay by people, sometimes you must be the maid, sometimes you must be the sole supporter, you must provide food, you must provide everything; if you can't provide that, people say 'I'm sorry, but you can't stay here anymore'" (15 August 2011).

For families living as tenants in backyard shacks,[6] space is tight and living conditions are cramped. Sharing toilets and kitchen spaces as well as entrances and thoroughfares, the constraints manifest in obeying landlord rules and keeping quiet about the things that bother you. A backyard dweller, living with her husband's family, reflects on the difficulties this produces:

"You must close your mouth, you can say nothing, it's not your place to tell them ... because it's not your house" (12 May 2011).

Living in these uncertain situations is not 'living', interviewees explained, but merely existing, getting by on a day-to-day basis, unable to plan for the future or to live fulfilled lives.[7] A father describes these contingencies as "a lack of roots or foundations", the consequence of his family moving about, finding different places to stay only for as long as they were welcome. Another, older, man explains:

"Waiting is like a particularity that you are in .… It's like you're in something that you wait for that [is] never going to happen. …You wait on a thing and everyday you don't feel the same .… It's pain[ful], like you feel you are in pain of waiting for this house" (23 August 2011).

Unstable, unrooted, a child, a ward of the state: modalities of waiting are long-term[8] occupations, an "indeterminate condition … [in which] the 'not-quite-knowing' is coupled with a radical arbitrariness regarding ever-changing procedures and the absolute lack of a predictable 'waiting period'" (Auyero, 2012, page 79). Ndebele describes waiting as "a tense endlessness, where something is always about to happen; and then it does not happen ... in limbo. Waiting. Not waiting. But waiting" (2003, page 14). The "absence without duration" (Ndebele 2003, page 1) that is central to waiting shapes not only everyday spaces and temporalities, but also encounters with and perceptions of the state after apartheid.[9] "Through quiet encroachment, the subaltern create realities on the ground with which the authorities sooner or later must come to terms" (Bayat, 2010, page 95).

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[6] On 'backyarding', see Crankshaw et al (2000), Morange (2002), or Lemanski (2009).

[7] Subsisting in a backyard shack on her mother's property, one woman speaks poignantly about how waiting has affected her emotionally, undermining her self-esteem and belief that she deserves better, something she desperately tries to keep from her children.

[8] For those interviewed, waiting lengths ranged from twenty-five years to a few months, the shorter times being the cases for younger people interviewed.

[9] For a rich literature on the South African state and the politics of development in cities after apartheid, see, for instance, on participation: Bénit-Gbaffou (2014); on conflicting rationalities: Charlton (2009), Schermbrucker and Oldfield (2013), and Watson (2009); on politics of 'the poor' and 'protest': Huchzermeyer (2001) and Pithouse (2009), among others.

Waiting as analytical terrain

In recent years, waiting has generated scholarly interest across the Global South, both analytical and empirical. Resonating with the modalities of waiting discussed above, for instance, in an incisive essay, Jeffrey (2008, page 955) distinguishes between four types of prolonged waiting, which he categories as "heightened suspense", "lost time", "panic", and "inertia". Auyero (2012) tracks a parallel set of experiences in Buenos Aires, Argentina, in the long and arduous process that citizens and resident foreigners pursue to access welfare and housing grants. Requiring beneficiary persistence and commitment, in this account the state is in control, playing with citizens, wilfully ignoring the urgency of their needs, the value of their time, dismissing them, and making excuses. He suggests that waiting reveals a "temporal process in and through which political subordination is produced" (page 2), demonstrating how "habitual exposure to long delays moulds a particular submissive set of dispositions among the urban poor" (page 9), a process which, he argues, makes welfare recipients "patients of the state".

Drawing on research on housing access in Brasilia, Brazil, Borges (2006) renders a different narrative of agency in an ethnography that reflects on the ways in which citizens negotiate eligibility criteria in order to obtain a housing plot. She demonstrates, in contrast to Auyero (2012), the ways in which people waiting for plots (and homes) manipulate and 'work' systems in order to obtain what is needed. Able to 'calculate',[10] to assess and negotiate encounters with the state and its housing politics, her analysis emphasises the ways in which families living informally and illegally strategically employ and embody the state criteria and algorithms that determine eligibility and one's position on the housing list. Here, state policies shape citizens and the ways in which they utilise basic resources, but not in dominating forms which strip individuals of agency. This account demonstrates Robins et al's (2008, page 1079) contention that "in the scramble for livelihoods and security, poor people tend to adopt plural strategies; they occupy multiple spaces and draw on multiple political identities, discourses and social relationships, often simultaneously."

With a parallel attention to micropolitics in *Timepass* Jeffrey (2010) explores lower-middle-class young men waiting for employment in Uttar Pradesh, India. He poses the question: "can a sense of limbo generate cultural and political possibilities", arguing that waiting is constituent of politics. "It's not just that limbo creates action across class lines; it also generated a particular mood among young men" (page 187). He demonstrates in this work that "chronic waiting may be the soil in which political projects blossom" (2008, page 956). Waiting in these physical and political 'grey spaces' does more than illustrate the hybridity that Young and Kiel (2010, page 90) recognise in places where formality and informality overlap, the "permanent temporariness" that McFarlane (2012, page 91) suggests can be experienced when the formal and informal are blurred. These accounts highlight the politics which waiting produces, rendering in different registers relationships between ordinary people—citizens—and states and their developmental projects in newly democratised postcolonial contexts.

While no scholarly research has focused explicitly on conceptualising waiting in the South African context, much attention has been paid to the informal urban contexts and conditions in which families wait and to the politics generated between state imperatives to develop housing and deliver services and citizen mobilisation to access these goods. This is a political terrain that Bénit-Gbaffou and Oldfield suggest encompasses "the formal and informal, legal

[10] Von Schnitzler (2008), for instance, offers 'calculability' as a notion to explain negotiations between states implementing policies (water access, in her research) and residents or citizens living with these consequences. Yet, this type of argument asserts the state as rational, coherent in its policies and with the capacity to implement; and, moreover, able to shape residents' subjectivities and access. Such assumptions are problematic in this context.

and illegal, confrontation and cooperative [acts] … the multiple tactics of engagement with the state by low-income residents" (2011, page 445). These authors prompt researchers to pay close empirical attention to the encounters and relationships that such processes build between state and citizen. Yiftachel reminds us too that 'grey spaces' and the politics they produce, in processes such as waiting, are "not simply a result of 'discrimination' but the consequence of institutional, material and spatial systems which accord unequal 'packages' of rights and capabilities to the various groups" (2009a, page 93). In order to explore the South African specificities that shape waiting institutionally and in everyday practice, in the next section we turn to a discussion on housing, an imperative central to the state project after apartheid.

Shifting housing policies and opaque waiting lists
The shortage of formal low-cost housing in South Africa and the difficult living conditions in which many poor South Africans exist have prompted a broad and vigorous debate about the housing crisis after apartheid (see Charlton and Kihato, 2006; Huchzermeyer, 2003; Tomlinson, 2006). The speed and scale, as well as geographies, of the development of public, state-funded, housing in South African cities have been consistently contested and debated. A product of apartheid segregation and its institutionalisation of racial inequality (Wilkinson, 1998; Williams, 2000), as well as of the adoption of neoliberal policies after apartheid (Huchzermeyer, 2009), conditions in informal settlements, backyard shacks, and overcrowded formal homes shape, and in many ways constrain, citizens' everyday lives (see Lee, 2005; Ndinda, 2007; 2009; Ross, 2005; 2010; Salo, 2004), as well as generate contentious city politics (Oldfield, 2000; 2004; Pithouse, 2009). In a democratic regime that proclaimed a 'better life for all' after apartheid (Huchzermeyer, 2010), housing, moreover, clearly has a social function beyond its materiality as a shelter and an asset (Butcher and Oldfield, 2009; Pithouse, 2009). A symbol and important material aspect of citizenship and belonging (Charlton, 2009; Ross, 2005, page 633), access to housing frames legitimacy to live in a city and partake in what it has to offer (Simone, 2009).

Yet, policies that shape housing access remain especially difficult to trace, barely comprehensible to state officials and waiting residents. The radical restructuring of local government from apartheid-era racially based structures to democratic institutions after apartheid's demise has led repeatedly to institutional and policy change.[11] In this context, for instance, local government has been restructured three times (City of Cape Town, 2011). Each time the logistics and policies of housing waiting lists change, so too do the city-level bureaucrats and offices with whom citizens engage.

Applying to be on the housing database is at first glance simple. Applicants fill in a form and present proof of their income to be included on a register for access to the City's rental property or to a new housing opportunity, which typically utilises government's once-off capital subsidy grant that enables beneficiaries to become owners of their own homes. For each of these options, there is a list of criteria.[12] The integrated housing database itself, however, is complicated: information regarding how it actually functions is not readily accessible, and many administrative changes have been made to housing waiting lists since

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[11] See, for example, Tomlinson (2006), Charlton (2009), Huchzermeyer (2010), and Tissington et al (2013) for discussion on the roles of various state institutions involved in housing delivery. While this subject is crucial and one explanation of the delays in housing development which lead to waiting, it is not the focus of this paper.

[12] Applicants for housing should be South African citizens over the age of 18, married or have dependents, and should not have had access to a government housing subsidy before. Most importantly, the applicant should not earn more the R3500 (~US$350) per month (see Tissington, 2011, pages 22–23).

the end of the apartheid era. The challenge in policy and its implementation reflects a broader conundrum: how to apply ostensibly nonracial policy to a landscape fractured by race in the past.

Under apartheid, racial categorisation shaped a resident's right to be in the city, to access state-built housing, or even to be considered eligible to be registered on a waiting list. In the Cape Town context, for instance, individuals formerly classified 'coloured' (mixed race) had the right to be on neighbourhood waiting lists in the segregated group areas. Those families categorised as 'African', in the majority, were excluded from any access (Oldfield and Zweig, 2010). In consequence, in the postapartheid era, to construct an equitable 'non-racial' list required initially racially differentiated criteria: if you were formerly understood to be 'African' in Cape Town you could bring any form of proof of residency date in the city (a pay slip, a bill, or a dated letter, for instance) and be inserted on the list in a position reflecting this date; in contrast, if you were formerly classified 'coloured' your insertion on the waiting list was determined by your place on an apartheid-era neighbourhood-administered list. The process of deracialising the state and its project led too to an urgent restructuring of local government, merging previously segregated local institutions, a complex process that required the integration of policy and process.

While the specificities of this restructuring played out in particular ways in cities across the country, we draw on the Cape Town case here to illustrate these dynamics. In Cape Town each of the thirty-nine local authority councils that existed during the apartheid era had housing waiting lists of their own, merged from neighbourhoods and managed in different ways. In 1996, when the thirty-nine local metropolitan areas were amalgamated into seven local authorities, the ways in which the housing waiting lists were managed changed again. For residents, these changes were not typically explained or understood in terms of the shifts in regime and in institutional configurations of government. Rather, these variations were noted as a change in the officials at the front desk and a move in the location of offices—from the centre of the city 15 km away, to a closer northern suburb, back to the city centre again— where applicants went to update their details or to apply for housing. One resident explained her tracking of these changes in the details of administration:

   "[A]fter a time, we had our [waiting list] books changed, our application cards. The colours
      changed from the white to the red. And [later] … it was blue as well" (23 August 2011).
Yet, when asked to explain further, she replied "I don't know. I'm not sure" what this colour coding denoted or meant.

The workings of and shifts in the organisation and logic of the housing database were also opaque to many housing officials working at the neighbourhood scale. Changes were bureaucratic, as well as substantive, differences which local housing officials found difficult to navigate and track. In the past, for instance, applicants were able to walk into a housing office in their neighbourhood to make enquiries about their standing on the housing waiting list. A housing manager explains:

   "before people could come to your office and you could say to them, look, here's the list,
      here's your name, there's still ten people before you" (23 April 2012).
This process helped to assuage the worries of many. The integration of many previous administrations' housing waiting lists into a single, centrally managed housing database has made this type of local navigation and communication impossible.[13]

While commonsense explanations of the process were largely based on how allocation happened in the past—for instance, that houses are allocated strictly on a first-come–first-

[13] The City of Cape Town's database provides a portal to check registration on the housing registry (see http://web1.capetown.gov.za/web1/searchhwl/HWL_search.aspx), but does not provide information regarding the status or position of an application.

served basis—this is also no longer the case. Housing allocation instead responds to a variety of indices in the database, such as income, the applicant's housing-area preference, the location and 'catchment' for a housing project itself; only then is the applicant's time spent waiting for housing taken into account (see Tissington et al, 2013). Reflecting on the consequences of these shifts and opacities, particularly the difficulties they produce, a neighbourhood-based housing official explains:

> "you've got to say to them [residents], look, I'm going to have to call … the database people and see ... what your chances are ... [Before] we could show it to them. 'Here's the list'.... Now we can't do that" (23 April 2012).

No longer working as an official in housing, another woman reflects further on the dissonance between the intent of a single integrated database and its effects. She explains:

> "[E]ven though you have one policy in place, it's a paper. It doesn't necessarily change people's mindsets, it also doesn't change the context, it also doesn't change the economic, social situation" (23 April 2012).

Integrated on paper, in practice families and officials alike continue to invoke the waiting lists of the past.

In these terms, families in need of housing plead with officials, and officials and residents struggle to understand and make legible the policies that regulate waiting, practices disrupted by the contingencies of shifting state policy approaches and techniques. Some residents who are unable to pay the rental for public housing refuse eviction, defying and renegotiating with neighbourhood housing officials, acts that protect encroachments and the realities of living in the meanwhile. Neighbourhood activists and leaders participate in and contest city-led housing processes, keeping their neighbourhood on the city's agenda, checking housing beneficiary lists, trying to ensure that the promised housing materialises (see Oldfield and Stokke 2007). Individual solutions sometimes emerge: the area councillor, the elected politician, can be petitioned and bargained with; special requests can be sent to the city mayor, who is allocated a small number of houses for emergency purposes in each city-built project (personal communication, 15 September 2010). Families take strategic decisions, moving to areas where housing developments are in progress, making the most of opportunities to become a housing beneficiary or, better yet, to access a home (see Oldfield and Boulton, 2005). At times, perhaps merely a performance of urgency, rather than a material change in housing access, these practices constitute an ordinary everyday housing politics that is both contentious and mundane: at times vigilant, mobilised and public; and, at others, quiet, invisible, by stealth.

More than a simple formula of citizens-as-future-beneficiaries and the state as competent-deliverer, these practices interweave with and challenge the institutional and bureaucratic processes governing housing access discussed above. The everyday lived realities of waiting and its encroachments, as Bayat reminds us, "can diminish or impair a state's governmentality [because] the operation of nonmovements challenges that logic of [state] power" (2010, pages 24-25). Yet, in South Africa waiting is also legitimate. Registration on a housing database remains normal. It is expected, a rite of passage of sorts for young people in the neighbourhood for whom applying for housing from the state is common sense, learnt from and recommended by parents and older generations. In the context of poverty, high levels of unemployment, and sustained and repeated promises from the state, putting yourself on the housing list remains the most likely route to obtain a formal house in the future. Although many issues could be analysed in this mix, here we reflect on the politics of waiting, simultaneously contentious and legitimate, that shape access to rights and the substantiation of citizenship.

Waiting for the state

> "I'm urging, I'm praying, I'm crying already, I just need a safe place to live … . I personally don't know when we're going to get houses. Yes, I know it's in the pipeline; that is just something to hold on [to]" (26 September 2011).

Struggling to maintain a home for her children and herself in one of the neighbourhood's informal settlements, this woman knows that housing is 'in the pipeline'. She is on the beneficiary list for the new housing project and can imagine her future home, which will be located a few streets over from her present shack. Arduous and contingent, waiting for the delivery of formal housing shapes her perception and imagination of the state. Conscious of being in and out of the state's gaze, she mobilises opportunities to ensure her place and right to a house as quickly as they arise, yet is careful to avoid jeopardising her chances. These contradictions, hardships, and strategies constitute the politics of waiting.

Framed here as nonmovements and shaped in everyday struggles for homes, individual acts collectively scale up and mould perceptions of and encounters with the state. Immersed in the daily practices of ordinary people, Auyero argues that this is the scale at which the state is experienced and made meaningful. He suggests:

> "These studies tell us that [the state's] institutional forms, organizational structures, and capacities are indeed important, but so is what the state *means* to people who inhabit it. And these meanings are constituted out of 'files, orders, memos, statistics, reports, petitions, inspections, inaugurations, and transfers, the humdrum routines of bureaucracies and bureaucrats' encounters with citizens'" (Gupta, 2005, page 28, cited in Auyero, 2012, page 6).

In line in state welfare offices, returning day after day, these stories reveal an 'overall mode of relating to the state'. At the mercy of the state's "tentacles", to use his language—that he contends that ordinary people are patients of the Argentinian state, agentless, submissive under the gaze and at the mercy of state power. This is what he calls "the patient model" (2012, page 153).

In the South African context, it is insufficient to theorise citizens simply as 'patients'. Although often not a collective form of mobilisation, waiting is neither passive nor impotent. It happens in 'quiet encroachments', mediated in the layered relationalities of family, of neighbourhoods and networks, in backyards and shack settlements, spaces that constitute the city and that shape encounters with the state. Waiting over years and decades, citizens assert a constrained form of agency. In doing so, they invoke and make legitimate claims on the state, however precarious and contingent their everyday lives. At scale, as Bayat argues persuasively:

> "The power of nonmovements rests on the *power of big numbers*, that is, the consequential effect on norms and rules in society of many people simultaneously doing similar, though contentious, things" (2010, page 20).

He suggests, moreover, that 'big numbers matter' because:

> "a large number of people acting in common has the effect of normalizing and legitimizing those acts that are otherwise deemed illegitimate" (2010, page 20).

Here, in this context, waiting is, moreover, legitimate: a state-driven legal and administrative procedure which citizens consciously sign up to in their application for housing. Its contentions, however, can be traced through the local housing office that cannot provide clarity on state processes; and the central housing database that is not accessible to lower level officials or the public. At the scale of the city, waiting is immersed in party-political struggles, emblematic in politicians who make promises of housing projects and 'homes for all'; and, nationally, in debates on housing policy, which promote integrated human settlements that are often illusory to those who are waiting to become part of such a vision.

Waiting is legitimate, yet also contentious, embedded in a contradictory mix of expectation of and demands on the state, bound up in experiences of hope and despair.

In the Indian context, Jeffrey suggests that ordinary people operate with a split notion of the state:

" On the one hand, they view the state as a craven, partial and disorganized set of institutions. On the other hand, they believe in the state as a sublime institution and source of authority, rationality and power" (2010, pages 146–147).

Gupta probes this tension further in *Red Tape* (2012), arguing that "structural violence is enacted through the everyday practices of bureaucracies" (page 33); in other words, the promise of housing and the practice of waiting are both products of the state's commitment to a bureaucratic rolling out of housing for the poor. Gupta argues further that "bureaucratic action repeatedly and systematically produces arbitrary outcomes in its provision of care" (page 6). The state's commitment to provide care, through housing, is precisely why citizens wait, conscious that the state is arbitrary despite its procedures, yet knowing that this process is one of the few ways to access a formal home.

Bringing together the violence of the state and its benevolence, Gupta argues for a theory of "[the] state that is pluricentered, multi-leveled and decentralized" (2012, pages 17–18), a useful disaggregation for reflecting on the South African state and the politics of waiting. The state has multiple faces, and conflicting roles and rationalities, evident in the lack of clarity on how the housing databases function and houses are allocated. This messiness is demonstrated through the negotiations of officials, the strategies and realities of citizens, the abstract goals and visions of policy, as well as the petty and often-awkward ways in which decisions are made in the contingencies of practice. Yet, the state is extraordinarily present, playing a pivotal role in providing housing and, for example, the provision of monthly social grants for the poor. It is visible not only through forms of rule and regulation, but also in smaller details of everyday life; the modalities of where and how people live while waiting. At the same time, nonetheless, it is also absent and its practices are neglectful, opaque, at times illegitimate, its intent questioned and questionable. It is with this paradox that we conclude our argument.

Conclusion

Waiting for housing marks not only a politics of finding shelter in the meanwhile, it also contours a contentious politics of encounter between citizen and state, shaping in part what it means to substantiate citizenship after apartheid. This mix of politics proves paradoxical: citizens are marked as legitimate wards of the state. Yet, simultaneously, to live in the meanwhile, and in the long term, requires subversion, an agency that is sometimes visible, in mobilisation and protest, and at other times out of sight, simultaneously contentious and legitimate.

The politics that waiting for housing generates is steeped not only in the contexts in which people live while waiting, but also in the material–bureaucratic encounters with the state. Immersed in shifting housing policies and changing techniques and practices of governance, waiting moulds in part how citizenship and rights are claimed in the postapartheid context, a critical addition to South African scholarship on housing. On the surface a seemingly unremarkable politics, waiting is substantively and numerically a significant nonmovement (Bayat, 2010), an experience shared by the majority of the urban poor, embodied in a politics of "quiet encroachment of the ordinary" (page 14).

Yet, unlike the Middle Eastern contexts on which Bayat reflects, waiting in the South African context is legitimate; it brings citizens into being, present and accounted for by the state. As a nonmovement, waiting reveals a contradictory politics, embedded in the legitimacies of state processes such as housing databases, laws, and formal rights, and

yet elusive, shaped by opaque state bureaucracies and marked by the often illegal and informal circumstances in which waiting takes place. Citizens are legitimately present and accountable to the state in order to access housing formally: on the surface patient, yet simultaneously sidestepping it, waiting in situations that defy the state. Here, waiting draws our attention to this terrain where the state is both present and absent and citizens are legitimate and illegal, the indeterminate and arbitrary state processes that Auyero and Gupta highlight.

It is in this contentious, yet legitimate and taken-for-granted context that waiting shapes citizens as political actors, able to assert a provisional and, at times, strategic agency. Although waiting for housing in South Africa is "in the order of things" (Auyero, 2012, pages 14-15) for the poor, citizens are not 'patients', submissive to the state. Nor are they necessarily part of collective forms of mobilisation and protest, acting in resistance to state practices. Neither impotent nor radical, as a nonmovement, waiting for housing in the South African context makes precise Jeffrey's notion of 'limbo,' as well as the contingencies and topographies that texture Yiftachel's notion of grey space. Significantly, it is in the temporalities, spaces, and strategies of waiting that state–citizen politics are moulded and contested.

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