

Point Taken:
Durban's Street Youth and the Creation of Informal Shelters

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* With the thoughtful suggestions of those who attended the UKZN history seminar, names of places have been modified.

There is one thing for sure about the Golden Mile. We all agree we need to keep that Golden Mile golden. I just observed one thing—the stars, the big stars that come in South Africa now. They end up only in Johannesburg and Cape Town. They don't come to Durban no more. Do you really want that to continue? Do you really want to be demoted as some sort of one of the towns, not a major city in the whole of South Africa? It's true. I don't care who says what. The Golden Mile area is one area that has made Durban different. So if you don't keep it, you are not keeping Durban and that begins to impact in the eThekweni province at large [Keynote speech by KwaZulu-Natal's Provincial Safety, Security, and Transport Minister, MEC Bheki Cele].

Greeted by resounding applause, MEC Cele's inaugural address highlighted many of the concerns expressed at the eThekweni Safety and Security Summit, convened at Durban's International Conference Center (ICC) on September 30th 2004. The summit was advertised as a joint partnership between the eThekweni municipality, provincial, and national government; and was well attended by representatives from the Metro Police, SAPS, Durban Chamber of Business, Departments of City Health, Social Welfare, Justice, Trade and Industry, and Home Affairs. The objective of the summit was relatively straight-forward: To reduce crime in KwaZulu-Natal. Or, as stated in the opening words of MEC Cele, "We are here today because we want to change the criminal face of the Province beginning with iTheku. We are here to today to say in one voice that there is zero tolerance to crime in KZN and 100% compliance with the law." To implement this objective, organizers of the summit divided the eThekweni Municipality into five operational zones: the Beachfront, the Central Business District (CBD), the Northern Areas, the Western Areas, and the Southern Areas. Each zone was discussed through a power-point presentation in which the speaker delineated the criminal problem, proposed an appropriate plan of action, announced the task-team force, and established a target date of resolution. Not surprisingly, the Beachfront and CBD—as major centers of commerce and tourism—dominated the summit proceedings. The key issues identified in these two zones included: the unseemly presence of street children and vagrants, the sale of alcohol to minors, the licensing of liquor outlets and nightclubs, the fencing of stolen goods in second-hand stores, prostitution, drug abuse, illegal firearms, undocumented persons, pornography shops, dilapidated buildings, and (perhaps a bit incongruously) the car-guard industry. A rather substantial list, addressing any of the above issues would daunt even the most proficient law enforcement officer. Yet, as MEC Cele repeatedly proclaimed, the Safety and Security Summit was about action and partnership, an agenda with clear objectives, specific projects, and deadlines. To spearhead the Minister's

campaign, organizers of the summit announced a city wide initiative that would focus on the regeneration of downtrodden buildings in the CBD. The pilot project would begin with a single apartment complex located in an area of the city known as the Point—an area which is a mere skipping distance away from everything the summit stakeholders wished to preserve and uphold as the embodiment of eThekweni: the Golden Mile.

Within days of convening the Safety and Security Summit, newspaper journalists reported their own spin on the conference. Headlines blazed with the news stories: “Joint plan of attack pledged against murky underworld,”¹ “Dodgy areas to be tackled one by one,”² “eThekweni declares war on crime,”³ and “Crime dens demolition: City blitz on ‘sick’ buildings.”⁴ These articles all shared similar accounts of the conference proceedings, with a main focus on the Minister’s plans to redevelop the city center. The *Daily News* summed it up best in the following commentary: “As the municipality steps up its no-holds-barred campaign to ruthlessly enforce the city’s by-laws, more than 400 buildings in the CBD alone have been identified as ‘sick.’”⁵ This association of disease with buildings in the Point area was a common theme in all the articles, with a notable focus on one particular building, Point Place. This building received an unprecedented amount of attention not only at the Safety and Security Summit but also at the stakeholder workshops held several weeks prior to the inaugural summit. Speaker after speaker stood up denouncing Point Place as an unregulated haven for criminal activities, a place of social degradation, hazardous living conditions, and bad hygiene. One of the representatives from I-TRUMP (Inner-Thekweni Regeneration and Urban Management Program) substantiated these criticisms in her presentation at the Safety and Security Summit:

The bad building that was identified is a building that we have been working on for quite some time. Interesting enough we have about sixty participants in our stakeholders workshop and about 95% all identified that same building. I asked people to say okay if they had to identify one particular building that you thought needed to be addressed urgently which one do you think it would be? And everybody said basically Point Place building. Let’s go address that building. It is an eyesore. It is a building which actually flies in the face of what the city desperately is *not* going to represent... Again issues of street children, liquor outlets, illegal nightclubs, stolen goods are known to be housed there. There are firearms, dangerous weapons being kept in that building. [It is] being used by commercial sex workers and most definitely being used by drug lords, etc... As I

¹ *Mercury*, October 1, 2004. News, p.4.

² *Ibid*

³ *Metro*. October 1, 2004. p.1.

⁴ *Daily News*, October 1, 2004. News, p.4.

⁵ *Ibid*.

said earlier, we're going to use whatever laws we can possibly use to actually cease activity in this building. Get the ownership of that building changed. And actually get it completely rehabilitated.

From the above narrative, we learn that Point Place is occupied by street children, sex workers, thieves, and drug lords. It is being used as a liquor outlet, nightclub, weapons storeroom, and cache for stolen goods. These representations of Point Place—all highly sensationalized—speak to the heart of the summit's redevelopment plans: namely how to “rehabilitate” the image of the Beachfront, the CBD, and eThekweni at large. Yet, by beginning with a premise of criminality, the organizers of the summit already set themselves up to fail. For the Point Place inhabitants also are invested in maintaining a certain image of the beachfront—an image that is a lot less threatening than the summit stakeholders have hitherto portrayed. Yet perhaps more significantly, by grouping the occupants of Point Place into a uniform collection of delinquents, the summit stakeholders risk the possibility of reinforcing the very outcome they wish to avoid: a social structure that has the makings of a criminal underclass.

The Setting: Point Place

The findings of this paper are based upon eighteen months of ethnographic fieldwork conducted at Point Place between the years 2003 through 2005.⁶ This paper is written in direct response to the speculative claims presented at the Safety and Security Summit. First, this paper primarily draws upon the perspectives of those individuals who reside at Point Place. Second, it situates the Point Place inhabitants within a larger contextual framework that specifically accounts for why these individuals have come together at this particular site, at this particular point in time. Third, it investigates the unique social formations which have arisen out of this shared urban space. And fourth, it considers future possibilities for buildings like Point Place and for its inhabitants who have nowhere else to go.

One of the most distinctive features of Point Place is its demographic composition, which consists mainly of older Zulu youth between the ages of 14 to 29. The second distinguishing trait of Point Place is the high degree of mobility experienced by its inhabitants. People are constantly moving in and out of this building, and at any given time, there can be up to 130 youth residing within Point Place. From the standpoint of the general public, the unregulated mobility and

⁶ My fieldwork methodology consisted of participant-observation and recorded interviews. To date, over 150 individual, group, and follow-up interviews have been conducted at Point Place. These interviews were primarily conducted in Zulu with the enlisted help of a research assistant, a young woman who spent over a year and a half living inside Point Place.

blatant visibility of the Point Place youth signals a cause for great concern. This anxiety often emerges in local newspapers, whereupon the youth residing at Point Place are portrayed in two distinct ways: that of deprived street kids (*amaferanje*)⁷ or that of depraved street criminals (*izigebengu*).⁸ These two descriptions are problematic for several reasons. First, the Point Place youth can be both *amaferanje* and *izigebengu*. They also can be neither. Or they can be a combination of the two at different points of time. Second, these terms tend to dichotomize the Point Place youth into fixed categories of victim/perpetrator, making it exceedingly difficult to imagine them as anything else other than a “problem” needing “rehabilitation”—either through the Department of Social Welfare (for the *amaferanje*) or the Department of Correctional Facilities (for the *izigebengu*). Finally, and perhaps most obviously, these concepts do not account for the ways in which the Point Place youth view themselves as individuals or as a collective entity.

Rather than subscribe to the negative connotations of *amaferanje* or *izigebengu*, the youth residing at Point Place regard their cohabitation from a more empathetic angle. They prefer to use the term *isinawana*. For the Point Place youth, *isinawana* expresses their shared predicament of living together in an extremely impoverished and unsettled environment. When asked to clarify the meaning of *isinawana*, they frequently invoke the term *skhoteni* (squatter). Yet, rarely do the Point Place youth personally describe themselves as squatters, which they tend to associate with an older age category. As one respondent from Point Place explains:

I think *isinawana* they call themselves like that to console themselves you see... When something is not going right, you always have something to lean on every time. You say like, eh you see those kids over there? They have everything. Me I don't have. Ay, it's okay. Me, I'm *isinawana*, you see.

In this context, *isinawana* becomes an identity of re-assurance, enabling the youth at Point Place to make sense of life circumstances which are beyond their immediate control. To call oneself *isinawana*, however, is not to say that these youth have internalized their predicament with unquestioning acceptance. Rather, their strategies to cope as *izinawana* show a marked understanding of the unequal power relations that imbue their everyday lives. And it is these very

⁷ *Sunday Times*, May 25, 2003. News. “300 street kids take over empty Point Road building.” *Isolezwe*, November 21, 2003. News, p.6. “Ziqhinqe epaki ‘izingane’ ezikhishwe ekhaya labantwana.” [At the park, ‘kids’ kicked out of children’s home].

⁸ *Isolezwe*, October 31, 2003. News, p.3. “Sivaliwe isidleke sobubi.” [We closed nest of crime]. *Isolezwe*, October 1, 2004. News, p.4. “Ngikhathale yimpilo yobugebengu.” [I am tired of thug life].

strategies, coming from a congregated mass of disenfranchised youth, which have the general public so worried.

Why Youth?

In South Africa, the National Youth Policy defines the category of youth as between the ages of 14 to 35 years. The province of KwaZulu-Natal is estimated to have the largest youth population in the country. In the eThekweni Municipality alone, youth comprise about 43.9% of the total population. These figures, taken from a document entitled, *Towards an Integrated Youth Development Policy*, were commissioned by the eThekweni Municipality for intervention purposes in various fields of health, education, and employment.⁹ In this document, the category of youth is a pre-determined given, delineated by an age criteria and characterized by certain universalizing tendencies. While appreciative of the well-intentions of an eThekweni youth policy, this paper questions some of the assumptions that are implicit in this document and similar policy initiatives. Namely, why regard youth as an unstable transitional phase, situated in between childhood and adulthood? Why not place youth-hood in the center of analysis, thereby recognizing its importance as a social category in its own right? Related to these concerns, why not highlight youth as a relational concept, with very different meanings and lived experiences for those who come from a diversity of backgrounds and personal circumstances?

Since Radcliffe-Brown's (1924) *The Mother's Brother in Africa*, studies on youth and their relationship to their elders have been an area of interest for anthropologists. Two early South African monographs, Eileen Krige's (1936) *The Social System of the Zulus* and Monica Wilson's (1936) *Reaction to Conquest*, both discuss youth as part of a larger development cycle, integral to the overall formation of holistically conceived cultures. Evans-Pritchard's (1940) *The Nuer* and Audrey Richards' (1956) *Chisungu* are classic examples of anthropologists using age sets and initiation ceremonies as privileged sites of study that are taken to reveal the cultural construction of youth as a meaningful social category. While more recent ethnographies no longer reduce childhood or adolescence to a set of structural processes, anthropologists continue to emphasize youth as a key, relational concept, central to theories of personhood and social identity. Philip and Iona Mayers' (1961) *Townsmen or Tribesmen* highlights these concerns in their multi-faceted study of Red and School migrants, whereupon the youth living in East

⁹ Prepared by Ants Unlimited (Development Consultants and Project Managers) and presented at Durban's City Hall on November 9, 2004.

London assume markedly different identities according to certain cultural and class predilections. More recently, anthropologists have focused on inter-generational struggles between youth and their elders, which in Southern Africa, may play out through a highly politicized context of witchcraft accusations.¹⁰

Investigations of youth identities have been an area of interest for historians as well. In South African scholarship, accounts of deviant urban youth often are explained through descriptive analyses of gang-formation.¹¹ These case studies are careful to distinguish the different internal composition of gang organizations which, depending upon mitigating political-economic circumstances, constantly change across time and space. Broadly speaking, these case studies can be grouped into two types of gang classifications: those with a predominately migrant, rural-based membership (as exemplified by the Durban *amalaita*) and those with a predominately settled, urban-based membership (as exemplified by the Sowetan *tsotsi*). Analyses of both the Durban *amalaita* and the Sowetan *tsotsi* give prominence to the importance of age-grades in the formation and solidification of gang identification.¹² Moreover, both studies cite criminality as a secondary aspect of gang association. The *amalaita* “were first and foremost migrant youth organizations whose members adapted a repertoire of Zulu rural cultural practices and forms of self-organization to cope with new conditions of life in town.”¹³ Likewise, the *tsotsi* street gangs of Soweto were formed in response to pressures of spatial territoriality, where the assertion of masculine dignity was of paramount interest—as opposed to direct involvement in criminal activities.¹⁴

These historical investigations of alternative youth organizations provide a useful template for thinking about the group solidarities of the Point Place youth. Similar to the *amalaita* and *tsotsi* gangs of the past, the Point Place inhabitants have created a sense of belonging from a position of extreme instability and uncertainty. They also have frequent run-ins

¹⁰ M. Auslander “Open the Wombs” in J. and J. Comaroff (eds) *Modernity and its Malcontents*. (Chicago 1993). C. Burke “They Cut Segements in Parts” in *Anthropological Quarterly* 73:3 (2000). I. Niehaus *Witchcraft, Power, and Politics* (London, 2001).

¹¹ C. van Onselen “The Regiment of the Hills” in *Studies in the Social and Economic History of the Witwatersrand 1886-1914: New Nineveh* (Essex, 1982). P. La Hausse “The Cows of Nongoloza: Youth Crime and Amalaita Gangs in Durban, 1900-1936” in *Journal of Southern African Studies* 16:1 (1990). P. Bonner “The Russians on the Reef 1947-1957: Urbanisation, Gang Warfare, and Ethnic Mobilisation” in P. Bonner, P. Delius, and D. Posel (eds), *Apartheid’s Genesis 1935-1962* (Bramfontein, 1993). C. Glaser “Swines, Hazels, and the Dirty Dozen: Masculinity, Territoriality and the Youth Gangs of Soweto, 1960-1976” in *Journal of Southern African Studies* 24:4 (1998).

¹² P. La Hausse, pp. 86-88. C. Glaser, pp. 723, 730, 736.

¹³ P. La Hausse, p. 79.

¹⁴ C. Glaser, pp. 719, 721, 725, 727.

with local authorities, which can escalate into violent confrontations. Yet, this paper is extremely hesitant to describe the residents of Point Place as a type of modern-day, gang organization.¹⁵ First, the hierarchical structure among these youth is quite minimal. Rather, the social groupings at Point Place are composed of more fluid, open cliques, usually based upon common interests, backgrounds, and immediate needs. Second, entry into Point Place is not particularly restrictive. Parochial sentiments do arise when perceived intruders (usually foreign African nationals) attempt access, either to the premises or to the girls. Yet in general, anyone in need can make use of the building at any time. Also, anyone can leave at any time. Third, there are no formal initiation rites at Point Place. The collective identities forged among these youth have been created out of years of systematic neglect on the streets, abuse by authority figures, and institutionalization at various children's homes, places of safety, and detention centers. Fourth, unlike usual patterns of gang-formation, Point Place is not the exclusive domain of males. Young women are integral to the creation of social groups within Point Place and should not be regarded as peripheral or subordinate to their male counterparts. This is not to say, however, that the two exist in a harmonious state of co-dependence. Relationships between the young men and women of Point Place are fraught with tension and remain one of the greatest sites of conflict, particularly in regard to issues of fidelity and the control over (re)productive rights.

To summarize, the present-day social organization of the Point Place youth does not encompass the rigid structure of a formalized gang association. It is just that in the absence of an adequate vocabulary this paper struggles to find a way to depict their urban collectivity. Therefore, it is with the applied insights of ethnographic description that this paper hopes to provide a clearer picture of those who make use of the Point Place building, where they have come from, and where they hope to go.

The Formation of Point Place

“We watched Point Place happen right underneath our very noses” [Street youth activist]. For the current inhabitants of Point Place, June of 2001 marks a particularly auspicious occasion. It signals the official beginning of their co-habitation inside Point Place. The social bonds formed amongst these youth, however, were in the makings long before 2001. To be more precise, these bonds were created within the institutional framework of a children's street shelter

¹⁵ A listing of gang scholarship in South Africa can be found through the Social Justice Resource Project at the University of Cape Town. <http://web.uct.ac.za/depts/sjrp/publicat/gang.htm>

which underwent many physical metamorphoses, from mobile containers along Durban's Harbor in 1997 to a more permanent structure in 1999—the Thuthukani Harm Reduction Center. In February of 2004, Thuthukani was shut down by the City Health Department. The closure was cited as a health concern, but as one youth astutely observed, there always have been rats and cockroaches at Thuthukani. Rather, the demise of Thuthukani can be related to a chain of events, not the least of which directly involved the Point Place youth who had an intimate knowledge of Thuthukani and its inner-workings since the earliest years of its existence.

Thuthukani was a phase one shelter, which means it accepted youth directly off the streets. It was funded and administered by the Street Children's Forum (SCF). Prior to 1995, the SCF was a loose association hosted within the City Health Department:

The social workers within the City Health Department, they were the ones that brought the children to the City Health Department for immunization. They cleaned them. They washed them, and also tried to do the reunification [with the families]. During that time they found there were various other organizations in Durban and in KZN who were working with street children. But everyone was working on their own. The city saw a need for a coordinated approach. [SCF member].

Once the SCF received sufficient resources and its own office space from the eThekweni Municipality (still next to the City Health Department), it began to operate as an umbrella organization and coordinator of various street children's shelters and service providers. Board-members of the SCF consisted of individuals who were affiliated with municipal and provincial departments in KZN. It also was composed of councilors from the ANC and IFP who then would report back to their respective standing committees. In 1997 the SCF founded its own daytime Reception/Referral Center, known to the Point Place youth as the "Containers." Through the Containers, the SCF established a common gathering point for street kids in Durban, where they could communicate with outreach workers, participate in recreational activities, and receive basic necessities like food, blankets, and clothing. Initially, the SCF received broad-based support from the other shelters. This changed though when the SCF shifted its orientation from an impartial umbrella organization to that of a competing service provider:

In the beginning everyone was like alright, a Forum that's good. But then they [the SCF] realized they couldn't survive as a Forum because no one funds Forums. You want to employ people, and you want to have good salaries. I'm not saying that's the only agenda, but the fact is people wanted stable livelihoods as well. So the only way was to become a service provider. The idea was that the Forum funded the service providers and promoted the service providers, but then it became a service provider. So all the service

providers said hang on a second. You have been raising funds talking about our project. But now you have become a service provider. We're not getting any funds from you. So what is going on there? [Street youth activist]

In 1998, the SCF began making plans to acquire a more permanent base. From the point of view of the SCF, they would be offering a desperately needed service—a phase one shelter that would take youth off the streets, provide basic rehabilitation services, and then refer them to long-term shelters with better equipped facilities. From a more cynical point of view, the SCF sought to establish their own shelter in order to access government subsidies and on-going financial support from the private sector. The opportunity for implementation came in 1999 when the SCF took over a children's shelter from the Department of Child Welfare. As one board-member from the SCF recalls:

Child Welfare, they actually had a shelter there, alright—at 127 Alice Street. After a lot of debate and a lot of argument and a lot of performing, Child Welfare, they couldn't manage it. They couldn't keep it going. They couldn't sustain it. It was in the most horrific, when I say horrific, I mean very, very horrific state. Because the Forum is not a service provider, but if in the Constitution, it stated, if there was a gap in the services, the Forum would be able to issue that responsibility until such time anything else could be put in place or whatever. So after much havoc and inquiring, we went and we signed over, and took it over on that Friday, and that was where the hotels and particularly the Holiday Inns, they brought food for them. We had nothing. We had no income or anything, and we had to then have it registered. And to be able to access welfare grants, you can't just find a building and feel that because you're going to put children in, you're going to be able to actually access R12.52 per child per month for welfare. It doesn't work like that so after, it took at least three or four months to actually get it registered as a first phase facility to accommodate the maximum of at that time seventy children.

It is in this political milieu that street children—brought in by outreach workers, the police, and City Health officials—began to access Thuthukani.

From the onset Thuthukani was beset by problems, with the two major ones being: insufficient resources and under-qualified, overworked staff. The actual setting of Thuthukani was a major site of contention as well. While out of sight from the beachfront area, Thuthukani still was within accessible walking distance of the Golden Mile. Moreover, it was situated right in the heart of Warwick Junction, one of the busiest and most frequented transport hubs in all of Durban. For the general public, Thuthukani was not far enough away. For the youth who made use of Thuthukani, its location was the most ideal aspect of residing at this shelter. Thuthukani essentially became a revolving door, where police collected street children along the beachfront,

drove them to Thuthukani, deposited them, and then saw them back on the streets the very same afternoon. If the child chose to remain at Thuthukani, he or she might stay there for several months before being referred to a second/third phase shelter. From the second/third phase shelter, the child would be placed within a school setting while at the same time would undergo a process of re-unification with his or her family. If the child did not want to return home or was unable to return home, it would not be long before he or she returned to the streets, again to be picked up by the police and again deposited back at Thuthukani, where he or she waited for several more months before being referred to another shelter. By the third time, the child (who increasingly is less likely to be looked upon as a child) realizes the futility of shelter-hopping and starts to regard Thuthukani as a semi-permanent base, where he or she can find similar companionship among the 80+ youth who also made use of this shelter at any given time. This scenario is a common story among the youth who reside at Point Place today. It should be noted, however, that the institutional experiences of girls staying at Thuthukani differed significantly from that of the boys.

In the vast amount of scholarship written about street children in developing countries, girls always are cited as composing a small portion of the overall street youth population. This usually is attributed to gendered expectations of household responsibilities in which girls remain at home for longer periods of time to help with domestic chores and younger siblings. Consistent with these findings, girls were in the minority at Thuthukani. Whereas boys might number somewhere around seventy, girls usually comprised of no more than ten at a time. Yet to say that there are fewer girls living on the streets because there are less of them utilizing shelters is a misleading argument, especially if one considers the admittance criteria deployed by the Thuthukani staff. Girls did come to Thuthukani quite regularly. Like the boys, they also absconded quite regularly. But while boys were allowed to return without sanction, girls were subjected to humiliating rebukes and often denied re-entrance based upon certain perceptions of their sexual behavior. Girls were considered more problematic because they could become pregnant and thus bring “shame” to the shelter. So where did the girls go after Thuthukani? It was highly doubtful they returned home. Nor were they excessively visible on the streets. The simple answer was that the girls went inside. Going inside, however, was not synonymous with sex work. Rather, like the older boys at Thuthukani, girls played an instrumental role in the creation and sustainability of “informal” street shelters throughout Durban—with the prime

example being Point Place.

The turning point for older street youth at Thuthukani came in 2001, when the SCF lowered the age limit of their entrance policy from 18 to 16 years. Reasons for this change were three-fold, as one member from the SCF recounts:

You know the Children's Act? A child is a child until the age of 18. And this is where children become institutionalized. They don't want to go home because it is very comfortable in the children's home. So you had those kids that turned 18 in the other phases or children's homes or wherever and of course didn't want to go home so they continue to stay in Durban so they stayed in the street. And of course now they come back, they're almost recycled coming back into Thuthukani. So now you've got kids over the age of 18 that couldn't, that should never have been in Thuthukani. They have already been through the system but because they are on the streets they come back, they're coming back into the system. That's the one group. Then you had the other group of kids that were involved in criminal activity where they would go out and do whatever and then bring stolen goods and it gets harbored in Thuthukani. And then the other was the sexual abuse.

All extremely serious allegations, the SCF addressed the above concerns by arranging for the police to evict youth over the age of 16 years from the premises of Thuthukani. More than thirty boys were awakened at four in the morning and provided with the requisite amount of bus/taxi fare to return to their respective homes. Some of these youth did go home but the majority remained in Durban, either living on the streets or finding alternative accommodation. One of the first collective gatherings among the older boys evicted from Thuthukani occurred within an abandoned, burnt-out apartment building, often referred to as Feranje. Not long after the boys were chased out from Thuthukani, the remaining girls followed them, joining them along the beachfront or residing with them at Feranje. Those who stayed at Feranje recall a time of dismal hardship, with many of them being sent to Westville prison for theft-related crimes: "We stayed there by flat about eight months. Then the police told us hey, we must get out from this flat cause now they said they don't like to see too many boys going around. They said we must leave." During the period that Feranje was in existence, another informal shelter was in the makings. It started with eight older boys who remained in contact with an ex-care-worker from Thuthukani.

Early Point Place

A multi-story apartment complex, Point Place is part of a restaurant which used to operate on a joint lower level. In the late-90s, the restaurant was vacated by its owner, along with many of the original flat holders. The space which once housed the restaurant has become a

nightclub run by Nigerians who access the building using their own entrance. The nightclub, while physically connected to the rest of the apartment complex, is very much its own separate entity. From the late 1990s onwards, a constant flow of tenants have occupied the apartment flats inside Point Place. With such a shifting tenant population and very few original owners residing in their flats, the body corporate of Point Place has ceased to exist, making it extremely difficult for the eThekweni Municipality to enforce its housing by-laws. By the time the youth from Thuthukani arrived, the water, electricity, and plumbing services inside these vacated flats had been cut off.

It is likely that the youth who were evicted from Thuthukani knew of the Point Place flats prior to 2001. Yet, in their minds, the Thuthukani eviction facilitated their collective residence as it stands today. These youth maintained a close relationship with a Thuthukani care-worker who was living inside one of Point Place flats. He worked as the building security guard and knew some of the original owners.

When I came there, that place was run by drug-lords and everyone, people were gambling there. And I told those guys to move out, but I told the owners look, I can't keep an empty building for too long. There are children here that need help and she said, since no one is here then we don't see no problem. And it has been that way since. Of course, one or two owners [expressed] their dissatisfaction, but they didn't have any idea or plan. Up 'til now they don't have a plan, but at least they knew their flats were safe. In the sense that they were there, you know.

With ambivalent permission from the remaining flat-owners, the care-worker allowed the displaced boys to enter Point Place and continue with the recreational programs they had been undergoing at Thuthukani. One youth, who was 16 years old at the time, recalls:

We used to exercise, go in the beach, and [he'd] tell us run, do this and that. He was like there for us. And for food, what we needed he was trying his best and asking these people and things like that. So food wasn't a problem. We used to get food so carry on, carry on, carry on, and then we told this other guys, and then 2001 many of them came out of jail now. And they came from home. They heard that we are here in Point so they all, you know, coming slowly, slowly, slowly, slowly, slowly. Then we started getting full in Point Place so there was lot of guys that came from Thuthukani, from home—some of them went home because they used to give money in Thuthukani when they send you home. They ask you how much is your bus fare? But you see the main problem is that they tell you to go home, but they don't know what's wrong. They don't ask you, what problem do you have at home?

Similar to the boys, girls who were living on the streets and at Thuthukani soon learned about the opening of Point Place. They too came to stay. One of the first girls to reside at Point Place

explains how she learned about this new shelter. At the time, Angel was 15 years old staying with a group of kids along the beachfront: “I met Thabo. He stayed in Point Place. I was used to Thabo. I saw him at Thuthukani. Thabo was seeing a friend of mine from my home town. He said there was another place, Point Place. I can stay there.” Angel’s memory of those first few months at Point Place matches the testimonies of the original boys: “I woke up in the morning. The boys were doing meditation. They would go and run at the beach in the sand. I came back and washed the dishes. They fetched the water. I would scrub the floors in the flat.” For these young inhabitants, their first few months at Point Place are remembered as a time of hope, self-discipline, and perseverance.

With the continuous arrival of older youth, the apartment flats inside Point Place were quickly transformed into countless spatial arrangements. Every available bedroom, bathroom, kitchen, closet, and three-cornered area was converted into multi-purpose sleeping, bathing, and eating quarters. Open foyers became a type of dormitory-domain, usually relegated to the little boys who might sleep at Point Place during times of bad weather. As the older boys became more settled, girlfriends were incorporated into their living arrangements. Depending upon the size of the enclosed space, anywhere from one to three couples might share a single room. The majority of rooms, however, remained single-sex dwellings. The girls took over one entire apartment and were quite insistent on maintaining an exclusively female dwelling.¹⁶ The three main bedrooms within this apartment were commanded by a core group of girls who knew each other from the streets and Thuthukani. The foyer became a communal sleeping area for more recent arrivals. In the female-only apartment, as many as four girls would share two blankets and a sponge-mattress, secure in the knowledge that their sizeable presence would deter any unwanted male intrusions. Thus, what started off as a temporary respite from street life became an increasingly permanent fixture for youth who began to routinize their accommodation into some semblance of order, companionship, and group protection.

Demographics

To try and account for the demographic features of the Point Place youth requires a certain amount of recognition that these results are inherently flawed. First, the frequent mobility of the Point Place youth challenges any definitive numbers. Some youth stay only for a few weeks or a few months never to be seen again, others move in and out and in again depending

¹⁶ One exception was made for a male transvestite who the girls eventually chased away for stealing their clothes.

upon personal relationships and family situations, while others, with no where else to go, consider Point Place their only true home. In October of 2003, the police temporarily evicted everyone from the Point Place building. A count of the youth who slept on the streets that evening totaled more than 130. It is likely these numbers were inflated as younger boys learned about the Point Place eviction and decided to join the massive congregation of youth sleeping on the streets. In June 2004, a more systematic three-day survey was undertaken. The number of youth residing at Point Place reached close to 100. Since June of 2004, this survey has been continually updated to include more and more youth who arrive at Point Place. Currently, over 200 youth have passed through the Point Place gates. While the numbers always fluctuate, Point Place accommodates between 70 to 80 youth on a regular basis, with more youth residing in this building over the payday weekends and school holidays.

Trying to determine the exact ages of the Point Place youth also is problematic. First, there is the temporal issue of an on-going survey, whereupon ages are not fixed at a single point in time. Second, many of the Point Place youth are familiar with institutional age restrictions and believe it is in their best interest to remain 17. Generally though, ages at Point Place range between 14 to 29 years, with the median age being 19 years. The majority of the Point Place inhabitants are between the ages of 16 to 24 years. Females tend to be on the younger side, between the ages of 16 to 19, whereas males make up a significantly larger portion of those youth over the age of 20.

Table 1: Age Distribution at Point Place

2004	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	Total
Males	1	1	9	9	5	11	9	15	10	5	7	0	3	2	0	1	89
Females	0	2	6	16	13	21	4	0	2	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	66
Total	1	3	15	25	18	32	13	15	12	6	8	0	3	2	0	1	155

Since 2004, the median age at Point Place has been increasing. This can be related to two factors: (1) the core group of youth at Point Place is becoming older and (2) in the process, acquire friends from an older age-grade. These older friends then bring in their own friends, who also tend to be from an older age category.

Perhaps one of the most significant findings of this survey is the high proportion of girls who reside at Point Place. As seen in Table 1, 43% of the Point Place inhabitants are female. For

comparative purposes, a one-day survey again was taken in May 2005. Out of 72 accounted for individuals, 29 of them were female, or approximately 40% of the total population. The high visibility of females inside Point Place stands in marked contrast to their relative absence on the streets. Furthermore, while Point Place is perhaps the most notorious informal shelter, it is not the only one. In qualitative interviews, girls occasionally mention other buildings like Point Place (urban dwellings that have no electricity or running water) where groups of youth, including females, congregate. One 19 year old describes a place where she lived with three other girls and one boy:

There's a place. You see I met a few friends. And then I told them my problem. And then, we were just around. We didn't really have a place to stay. And I had no boyfriend to like, say like fine, I'm staying with my boyfriend and everything. There's a building down there. It's not a flat. It's just a building. It was a club before. So a friend of mine used to live there. So we met up with him. We went to stay there for the whole month.

Still, among these other mentioned informal shelters, Point Place stands apart in its relative durability and sizeable presence of young occupants.

Perhaps not so surprising, the majority of Point Place inhabitants come from surrounding townships and informal settlements like Umlazi, KwaMashu, Lindelani, Mayville, Ntuzuma, Inanda, Hammarsdale, Clermont, and Verulam. Again, trying to determine the origins of these youth is somewhat problematic because many of them have grown up in several different households, on both their mother's and father's sides of the family. Even so, the majority of the Point Place youth cite townships as their principal place of residence, approximately 75%, whereas the remaining 25% claim rural origins. Those deriving from rural areas tend to come from KwaZulu-Natal, with a smaller portion arriving from the Eastern Cape. Consistent with these findings, 80% of the Point Place inhabitants have identified themselves as Zulu, with Xhosa being the next largest group at 11%. The remaining 8% have identified themselves as Sotho, Swathi, Shangaan, or Coloured. The Sotho speakers predominately come from Johannesburg and the Free State. Because everyone speaks and understands Zulu, ethnicity is not a major point of contention at Point Place. Occasionally internal differentiation can be seen in the nicknames given to those youth residing at Point Place, for example: Msotho, Mxhosa, or Khalathi. These names are not considered particularly offensive but rather, like all nicknames at Point Place, are a way of quickly distinguishing someone based upon their personal background, physical appearance, or personality.

While qualitative interviews with the Point Place youth provide a much clearer understanding of their home situation, the survey did include a question about the existence of their parents. Out of 150 respondents, 45% of the Point Place youth claim both their mother and father are still alive. 29% cite one remaining parent and 21% have no remaining parents. 5% are unsure about the status of one parent. Still, for all these youth, it is rare for any of them to be completely bereft of kinship ties. These findings suggest that there are other determining factors, besides the loss of a parent, that are contributing to the influx of young people into Durban's city center. Some of these additional factors include poverty at home and strained family relationships. For the older youth, employment opportunities and chances for self-advancement are common reasons for residing at Point Place.

Disowning the Point Place Youth

In the early morning of October 2003, the Metro Police, SAPS, and SANDF invaded Point Place to search the premises for drugs, stolen goods, and illegal weapons. Brandishing guns and tear gas, the police forced all the occupants outside where they were rounded up into paddy-wagons and driven to Durban station. Upon their release from the police station, the Point Place inhabitants walked back to the Point to retrieve their lost possessions. The police, meanwhile, had thrown most of their belongings into rubbish trucks and were letting very few people inside the building to find their ID books. For those who resided within Point Place, the unexpected eviction was a devastating blow to their morale:

All of a sudden we were surrounded by God knows what. It was like we were the sin of—you know those organizations from the Muslim world? Al Qaeda or Hammas, you know? We were one of those freedom fighter cells and they found us at last... We all thought it was some part of a joke, a big joke. Up 'til now, I don't know what joke.

It was in the morning. We were trying to clean the room and then one of my friends come and tell us, "Hmm, come and see outside. There's police and soldiers. I think they're coming to close the flat." Then they came. Two men were carrying guns, and they say, Out! Out! Out! And then we told them please wait for us to take our clothes. They said No, go out! Go out! Go, go, go! We left our clothes. A lot of our clothes were left there in Point Place... They put us in the vans and trucks, the SAPS trucks. They took us to CR Swart. Then in CR Swart, we stay there 'till the afternoon. And then in the afternoon we went back to the streets.

With nowhere else to go, 130 youth slept outside across the road from Point Place. The following day, to avoid the imminent threat of rain, they located a nearby warehouse with an over-hanging roof. The next four nights were slept on the sidewalk pavement. During this time, concerned

members of the community brought food to sustain the now-homeless Point Place youth. On the sixth day, the Metro Police—under immense pressure from the city council to resolve the situation—informed the Point Place youth that a bowling alley would accommodate them in Albert Park. About 40 of the remaining older youth were loaded into paddy-wagons and driven to Albert Park. Yet upon arrival, the keys to the bowling alley could not be found. So after further instruction, these youth were brought to Thuthukani—the very shelter that chased them away in 2001.

To put it mildly, the SCF and Thuthukani care-workers were not pleased about the Point Place arrivals. They were placed in the tenuous position of having to control a large group of youth who did not take kindly to imposed rules and regulations. Still, what could have been a manageable situation turned into an unbearable one as they repeatedly clashed with the Point Place youth over issues of respect and compliance. The youth from Point Place, meanwhile, were quick to discern their outcast status:

They don't take us as Thuthukani's children. They take us as Point Place children. That's the word they using... Whatever we got, we used to share in Point Place, but here we don't share. We don't, they don't share with us.

It's better here [than Point Place] 'cause we've got water, electricity. But we're not comfortable 'cause they're not treating us as they treat the other kids who stay here in Thuthukani. We, the Point Place, they treat us bad. Maybe it's not that they treat us bad. It's just some of us, they've got bad attitudes. So that is why they treating us, all of us, bad. Instead of treating those who do bad things.

Three weeks after their arrival, the older youth at Thuthukani were ordered to vacate the premises. That evening, about 60 youth slept in a park near the Golden Mile. The following morning, police officials—notified by private security from the surrounding hotels—came to chase away the emerging camp. Just as the Point Place youth were about to lose the confrontation, they recognized a famous television actress walking across the grounds. They explained the situation to her, and she immediately contacted the press and city mayor to inquire about the recent eviction. That afternoon the mayor informed all the youth that they would be allowed to return to Thuthukani. The same problems remained though, and by February 2004 the police, with instruction from the SCF, closed down Thuthukani. The younger kids were taken to places of safety while the older youth were finger-printed and then left to fend for themselves. As a final parting shot, a street youth organization (ironically called I-Care), posted the following

announcement on their website:

Before the criminals moved in, Thuthukani was a temporary haven for Durban's young street children, a sort of one stop shelter where they could be assessed by social workers. However, that refuge was shattered the moment the police closed down a seedy joint in the Point in October. Authorities allowed 20 displaced adults from Point Place to stay for three days at Thuthukani (in Alice Street)—and they never left. Instead, more of them moved in and before long, kids, men, and women were living under the same roof. This mix gave rise to a dangerous environment which saw the newcomers virtually seize control of the center.

Hardly newcomers at all, the Point Place youth very much are a product of Durban's social welfare system.

The Re-opening of Point Place

During the time that the Point Place youth were residing at Thuthukani, one of the flat-owners protested her forced eviction. With the legal aid of a court injunction, she was allowed to re-occupy her apartment.¹⁷ Once the Point Place gates re-opened, younger inhabitants slowly returned to the building. The formal closure of Thuthukani triggered a second, more visible congregation of youth who made their way back to Point Place. The police must have anticipated this because the following morning, they evicted about twenty occupants from the first two floors of Point. Again the Point Place youth were rounded up into police vans. This time they were driven to distant locations outside the city center. Every single one of them walked back to the Point. Upon their return, one of the girls made the following comment about the city-sanctioned removals: "There's nothing they can do. We were born on the streets, and we're going to die on the streets."

To a certain extent, the police raids and evictions are secondary concerns for the Point Place youth. Most of their daily energy goes into the mundane details of simply surviving. While the composition of individuals within Point Place constantly changes, each room (or cluster of rooms) forms the basis of a nucleus group, where its members depend upon one another for basic sustenance—in both its material and immaterial forms. The daily activities within these rooms revolve around household chores of keeping the area tidy, cooking, sewing, and the repairing of broken items (usually doors). Fetching water from the public taps and the washing of clothes, linens, and shoes on the rooftop also comprise a significant portion of these routine activities. Each room has its own system of delegating chores. Among residing couples, boyfriends usually

¹⁷ In July of 2004, Durban's High Court ruled the 2003 eviction as unconstitutional and therefore illegal.

provide the monetary funds for their girlfriends to buy food and prepare the meals. Girlfriends also may be expected to clean the living area and wash the clothes. This is not a strict pattern, however, and in practice boyfriends do help with the cooking, cleaning, and washing of clothes.

See in Point Place, they were surprised that Khaya was doing my washing and the baby's washing. They said I gave him *muthi*. Like, for him to listen to whatever you want. For him to do my washing—it was something unusual and for him to do the baby's washing too, it was something unusual. And other boys started doing their girlfriend's washing too. There's this guy, Sphiwe, you know him, huh? Sphiwe used to do Thandi's washing, and Thandi didn't do anything. He used to cook and clean, do her washing.

The boys also are more likely to carry in full containers of water—an arduous task that the girls avoid for several reasons: “People always say there are those street kids. They are going to fetch water at the public toilets.” Sanitizing the communal corridors, stairways, and front entrance tends to be the responsibility of younger boys who eventually transfer the task to more recent arrivals. With time, these boys might be delegated the task of watching over the front gates and informing others of any troublesome intruders.

Communal cooking and the sharing of food (either donated or bought) are of paramount importance for establishing friendships at Point Place: “I see my friend, if I'm hungry, we'll be hungry together. If she has something, she'll give to me too. She won't eat alone in the corners.” It also can be a source of unrelenting conflict, particularly if one room is seen to be consuming more food than another:

They want us to share everything with them... When did this thing start? Me and Thulie saw that others were eating in the corners, like this, like this, like this... Then we had our own room. Then one day we went to buy food. They just finished eating. Thulie said she had R20. She said let's go and buy food. Mpume followed us. She said no, I'm following you. When we arrived, she ate. I said, *hawu*, you're eating again? They're eating alone. When we buy our own food, the only thing they want is food. When we are not there, they eat alone. But we left some food for them. Now we are stupid.

Sharing food also is one way of indicating an intimate relationship between boys and girls at Point Place: “You see I like to give that girl money. If I give her money she wants to eat that money with me, to share with me. She too, if she gives me money, I want to eat with her, you see?” If a boyfriend is caught giving significant amounts of food to another girl, it implies he has an additional love interest and may be grounds for a break-up: “First day she came, hey she was *jola* [in love] with Shorty. Hey, I say no more to *jola* with Shorty because Shorty wants another girlfriend now. He forgot me, but I never mind, I went and found my own food.”

Perhaps more so than food, the distribution of clothes within Point Place signals a complex ranking of friendship and personal status—particularly for the girls:

In the morning, they decide okay you today are going to wear white pants and Lusanda will wear black pants. And then you will like bathe in the afternoon. Then you'll wear those clothes, and she changes her mind. She'll just tell you to take them off. Even if you don't want to, you have to take them off and give them to her.

The command that a girl displays over the delegation of clothing usually is restricted to her own peer group. For example, if one girl borrows an item of clothing from a girl in a different clique, she is not expected to return the clothing until after it is worn. All borrowed items, however, are expected to be washed. To not wash borrowed clothes indicates disrespect or personal animosity. Quite often it is the younger girls who are the brunt of this practice. Clothes also may be instrumental in the acceptance of new girls:

The [first] time I came here, Thulie saw me. She saw me by Spar and greeted me. We were wearing the same things, same t-shirts. She greeted me, said, "Hi, how are you?" So I told her that I'm fine. She said, "What's your name?" I told her my name. She told me her name. She said, "Would you please come and visit me? I'd like to be your friend."

Befriending outside girls with nice clothes is a common recruitment strategy among the Point Place females. Yet, while always on the look out for new outfits, the accrument of too many clothes can lead to a girl's downfall. Other girls will steal her clothes, on the justification that she already has plenty of items to wear. They will gossip that she is engaged in sex work, for how else can she afford such nice ensembles? Or her boyfriend, if he is not the one supplying the outfits, will begin to suspect that she has a new lover. Thus, it is in the best interest of the Point Place girls to distribute their clothes widely, for it not only increases the selection of their own wardrobe but also acts as a leveling device against resentment or suspicious accusations: "These are Tombi's shorts. The shirt I bought from the little boys for R5. But the tracksuit, Sbu bought it for me. And he's still going to buy me clothes. I told [my other boyfriend] lies. I said I got it from home."

At Point Place, income generating practices generally are left to the boys. Typical jobs include: car-guarding, car-washing, street-sweeping, the selling of fruits, vegetables, candy, cigarettes, and used clothing, operating sidewalk phones, street-performing, pan-handling, and the occasional temporary work of carrying boxes or painting houses. Among the Point Place youth, an occupational ambiguity exists between asking for something and taking something.

This ambiguity is reflected in the commonly used word *-phanta*, which has the double meaning: to beg/to steal. Perhaps in English usage, “to hustle” would be the closest equivalent: “*Bengizula, yabona nje. Sihamba siyophanta*” [I roamed around, you see. We went and hustled]. Those who do steal generally limit their illegal activities to petty crime—the snatching of cell-phones, cameras, purses, and gold jewelry. All these sources of income at Point Place are highly irregular and so the amount of disposable cash varies. On average, the boys make anywhere between R15 to R40 a day, with many days earning nothing and other days earning an excess of R1000. They generally spend their money on food, clothes, shoes, cigarettes, glue (for sniffing), *zol*, Mandrax, or beer. Groups of boys usually pool their money, an effective strategy that ensures they have something to eat or smoke everyday. A significant portion of their money also is given to their girlfriends. Those with thriftier inclinations deliberately avoid the Point Place girls for this very reason: “A girl loves you when you have money. Or I say when you hustle a lot. A girl loves you for that because you have your money. Not that she loves you. She loves money.”

For the Point Place youth, the “fast life” of residing in town often is contrasted with the consequences of being caught and sent to Westville prison.

You see me I was a popular guy in Point. Everybody know me... So now, hey, if you're popular, everybody knows you, they say you drink here, you drink that, you do this, you do that. But you have to change. So many of my friends, they arrested. Others they got 15 years, 10 years, 20 years, 25 years... We did everything, everything you see so I decided from there I can't go and stay there 15 years... I got three years now outside so I can't go back there. I can't really go back there. There's no life there.

The majority of arrests at Point Place involve theft-related crimes. Once sent to prison, the Point Place youth can await trial from anywhere between one to six months. It is here that they are likely to join one of the prison number gangs, either the 26's or the 28's. The youth at Point Place generally describe the difference between the two as the following: The 26's love money, the 28's love boys. While the Point Place boys are willing to admit affiliation to the 26-gang, not one of them will profess public allegiance to the 28's.¹⁸ Reasons for joining the 26's usually are related to material concerns. Inside Westville prison, it is an initiation rite to hit and take the possessions of non-26 inmates: “If you are not in the group, you can't have your own cigarettes and money. Even if your mother sends you cigarettes or money, they take it.” Joining the 26's

¹⁸ Occasionally, the Point Place boys will mention friends who are 28's. The girls at Point Place generally are excluded from the number-gangs as members in their own right. They are more likely to be regarded as auxiliary members. One Point Place girl, however, has admitted secret loyalties to the 28's.

also may protect boys from being raped. Outside Westville prison, the number gangs hold less personal appeal. The majority of Point Place youth, while knowing the hand signals and special language of the 26's, do not consider themselves to be "workers" (i.e. active members). Moreover, one does not have to join the 26's to reside at Point Place. As a final point, the social ordering inside Point Place is not conducive to an exclusive 26 membership, for it would pose a serious challenge to the autonomy of the girls. In 26 lore: It is money first, then females. Yet, one would be hard-pressed to find a girl inside Point Place who would accept such an arrangement.

Boyfriends and Girlfriends

In addition to the stigmas of being regarded as *amaferanje* or *izigebengu*, the Point Place girls also have the added burden of being labeled as prostitutes by the police and surrounding public. Like the boys at Point Place, the girls do have multiple sexual partners. It does not mean, however, that they are engaged in formal sex work. The girls at Point Place are quite disapproving of those involved in prostitution. It is not uncommon for them to exert a considerable amount of social pressure on anyone whom they suspect is engaged in sex work:

We told them that people are calling us prostitutes. They are calling every girl in Point Place. They say girls from Point Place are prostitutes. So we told them that if, like, we're not saying they must stop. If they want to carry on, they must leave us. But if they don't want to [leave Point Place], they must stop, [then] they can stay.

The girls at Point Place differentiate their sexual relationships through a ranking of personal desires, in which one boy usually reigns as the paramount love. Material considerations do play a significant factor in girls' decisions to choose a boyfriend. This is why she may have multiple partners, to help augment the food, clothing, or accessory situation. Everyone recognizes though that it is a bad idea to have two publicly acknowledged boyfriends inside Point Place. When this occurs, a "meeting" will be called, whereupon the girl will be forced to pick one boy:

When Reggie came he was going out with Nolutho. Then when Lucky got out from jail, they said Nolutho must choose. They had a meeting, and she chose Lucky. They said she was causing the boys to fight. The boys wanted to poke [stab] each other.

Chico, I started seeing him first, and they called a meeting for us. I chose Andile. He was hustling. We didn't argue that time. He wasn't doing these things that he's doing now [i.e. dating other girls]. When Chico comes out [of jail], I'm going to start dating him again.

While girls generally stick to dating one boy inside Point Place, she may have an outside lover,

whom she will refer to as the “i.k.” (shortened for *isoka*), the “O,” or the “*ibunja*.” The *ibunja* in particular denotes an older person who is dated purely for monetary reasons.

In the morning, I used to accompany [my boyfriend] when he sold things along the beach. I always saw the same guy who wanted to talk to me. One day I gave him the chance. He told me that he loved me and said he would take care of me. He said if we dated, he would buy me nice clothes.

These outside boyfriends, while providing an important source of income, are considered subsidiary to the Point Place boyfriend. If a Point Place boyfriend discovers his girlfriend has another lover, a massive confrontation will occur. This can escalate into extreme forms of physical violence. The Point Place boyfriend also may demand that the girlfriend return everything that he gave her, including food. Since the girl already has eaten all the food, this usually proves impossible. Hence, it becomes very difficult for girls to break-up with their boyfriends inside Point Place. To escape this situation, the girlfriend will have to run-away or find a new, more intimidating boyfriend.

The boys at Point Place alternate in their opinions of the girls who reside with them. On the one hand, they regard them as an integral part of their social group, deserving the same compassion and respect: “Most of the girls, they depend on us because there’s no one that can just take many girls and stay with them—especially when you know about their past and things like that. We also come from the same place and we have the same problems.” On the other hand, the girls can be a constant source of aggravation, deserving any verbal or physical abuse that comes their way. The boys frequently complain that their female companions rarely help with communal cleaning, are always asking for money, and are quick to involve the police in any internal disputes:

Sometimes you go in Point Place, you cross. You never eat whole day. Those girls there, they come to you. They make you more cross! Maybe they asking you for cigarettes. You don’t have cigarettes. Maybe you not eat for whole day, you cross. They come with a style. They don’t say give me cigarette. They come with a style, right. Hey, hey, hey—all this time asking for cigarette. Now when you tell them you don’t have a cigarette, you cross. Now you can’t tell them no, I don’t have cigarette. Can’t tell them no, I don’t have cigarette. I DON’T HAVE CIGARETTE SEE! Then she is going to start and say, hey don’t talk like that to me. Now you see you can’t stop talking like this. Now you’re going to hit her. When you hit her, what is going to happen? She is going to go to the police station. But who start talking to you?

Like the girls at Point Place, the boys also tend to have several sexual partners. They, however,

are more likely to choose their girlfriends from inside Point Place. Again, one girlfriend is considered the paramount love interest, while the other ones may be temporary arrangements. The boys usually break-up with a girlfriend on the grounds that she is making him “stupid” or turning him into a “fool.” This usually means the girlfriend is asking for too much money or is seeing other boys:

Let me tell you, Zanele makes me a fool and today too, she made me a fool... She says she loves me and she made me buy her a pie. I ate it... We had an argument, and I told her there are girls who love me. Not her. I told her to shut up and I left... The thing that made me not to love her was because she made me a fool.

These relationships between the boys and girls at Point Place are a source of great conflict and while fidelity is widely regarded as an ideal state of true love, in practice there are very few monogamous couples residing inside Point Place. Rather social relationships are stretched to make multiple connections, whether this takes the form of friendship, sexual partnership, or even fictive kinship: “You see I don’t want to leave them because I got years with them. They’re like my brothers. I haven’t got a family. They’re my family, all of them.”

Conclusion

For those youth who reside at Point Place, the closure of the building figures as a constant anxiety, close behind their worries of daily survival. Most of the Point Place inhabitants claim they will return to the streets if the police evict them again. Yet, it is quite possible that their removal will not come from the direction of the municipality intent on rehabilitating the Point, but rather through the private interests of new flat owners. As this paper is being written, five of the apartments inside Point Place (as well as the night-club) have been bought by a private owner. Plans for renovating the flats are underway and it will not be long before a portion of the Point Place youth are displaced yet again. The chances of them finding another apartment complex as centrally located or as accommodating as Point Place are quite slim. One only has to look to the end of Point road to see that the city is not building for them. Yet, even amidst these development ventures, it is unlikely that the youth residing at Point Place will ever give up their urban attachments. For them, Point Place signifies more than a place of residence. It has become a center of social networks that just as easily can be transposed to the streets, in between the regulated spaces of the city’s development projects. Moreover, Point Place is not an isolated phenomenon. It may be the most visible informal shelter but others do exist and will continue to exist as the unintended spin-off of Durban’s formal institutions. At present, the inclinations of

those youth who utilize informal shelters are not oriented towards crime but rather towards survival. This may change though with every forced removal and detention at Westville prison. Still, as of now, the Point Place youth have quite conventional goals and aspirations. They too would like a safe clean place to live where employment opportunities are accessible, along with future possibilities of companionship and romantic partnership. Most of all, they would like to belong to a community that values their presence and recognizes they have just as much entitlement to live not on the margins but in the center of it all: the Point.

Perhaps it would be fitting to conclude this paper where it started, with the Safety and Security Summit. Many of the Point Place youth planned to attend the conference. Yet, once they saw the large number of law enforcement officers dressed in full uniform, they decided to turn back. In the end, only one of the Point Place boys remained and sat through the entire duration of the conference proceedings. When the presentations were finished, he stood up and expressed the following concerns:

I come from the same building that is going to be closed. [Laughter from audience]. Serious. I am one of the street kids. Of course, I grew up on the streets. That is so. What I wanted to ask is this: Okay. I understand that the law, that the building has to be closed. Of course there is crime there. Already there's crime. And what I want to say is that half of us is doing crime just because of they want to survive and things like that. But of course, half of us, we want to change. We have done everything. We have done crime. We have done a lot. We have, we have done everything like so we are sick and tired of this life that we're living so. Now we just want to ask people that if is there any way that you can really help us. We will try to, and we'll accept that, and we appreciate that wherever help comes because we are really sick and tired of this life that we're living. So what I wanted to ask you then, if the building is closed, is there any plan or anywhere that we can go to or we can live because we can't just go back to the streets and do the same life because things have come more worse, worse, worse than if we decided to change our lives. But since soon as the building is going to be closed then we will, we will give up. You know, we will have no hope left. Go back to that same position. It will be murder if we're like that.