For a Critical Logistics of Eviction: Producing Property Through Mobility in Cape Town

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Abstract: Understanding eviction as a positioning of bodies and loss in a property relation, I argue a critical logistical reading may offer a means of describing the capacity to evict within the economic, racial, reproductive, and political configurations that drive the decisions and motives for eviction. With a focus on the Cape Town metropolitan area, I trace one route through the flows conceptualised in eviction practices in urban informal settlements in the Western Cape and their material organisation. I follow preparations from flow charts to demolition, through in-depth interviews with individuals responsible for the planning and physical conduct of forced evictions, security facility visits, and analysis of documents and news reports. Adding to existing dialogues on the failure of housing delivery in South Africa, I describe "eviction-logistics" as a mechanism for organising loss and an additional point of intervention for housing and land justice.

Keywords: eviction, logistics, South Africa, Cape Town, housing, private security

Introduction

...it's not just where we wake up one morning, and we say, "Okay, you know what? We're going to evict 4000 families." You know? There's ... there's a lot of planning that goes with it.

—Theo Moses, Chief Operating Officer, Red Ants Eviction and Relocation Service, South Africa, 2022 (#008)

We may describe *eviction* as a form of mobility produced in the making and remaking of the uneven relations of property, one which connects the large-scale movements of capital and geopolitics to embodied forms of force and violence. For the political economy of accumulation by dispossession to occur, it must be enabled by this process, "the absolute expulsion of people and their possessions from a space to which they cannot return without the permission of the owner" (Blomley 2020:45). The science and practice of positioning bodies in a property relation through the prevention or allocation of loss can also be called *logistics* (Harney and Moten 2021:14–15). Following Charmaine Chua et al. (2018:621), I turn to the "critical logistical research agenda, broadly conceived", which "is concerned to interrogate how the politics of financial, corporeal, and material movement reorganizes social relations with and against profit and power", as one possible path of exploration to understand *eviction-logistics*. This essential logistical

component to eviction is part of the missing "how" of evicting institutions and technologies that require a degree of epistemic plasticity to study (Baker 2021) and cross-disciplinary experimentation to understand how infrastructures naturalise forms of choice and decision in displacement (Roast et al. 2022:632). Chua's (2018:13) practice of "logistical reading" "seeks to uncover how abstract political rationalities of flow impact the concrete and lived worlds that become subject to the demands of commercial movement". Taking South Africa, which draws our attention to the collective and racial violence of evictions (Weinstein 2021:17), and where "ongoing processes of displacement dispossess the social and political potentiality emergent in urban occupations" (Wilhelm-Solomon 2021:990), as its point of orientation, this paper attempts a logistical reading of eviction focused on Cape Town. This city faces an intensive housing shortage shaped by a history of racial controls on mobility, where rapid "prevention" of unsanctioned settlements appears as a fix to occupation rights won in the struggle against apartheid. Instead of a focus on the causes and decisions that lead to eviction, as explored by a groundwork of excellent economic, ethnographic, and legal studies of eviction in South Africa, my aim is to understand the materials and practices which make eviction, and therefore the decision over whether to evict, possible.

In the next section I will begin by introducing key lessons from the study of logistics as the organisation of loss and abandonment, then briefly describe the ways that eviction in South African housing politics has been understood as the persistence of a long-term project of warehousing and mobilising a resistant racialised population. I turn to methods from logistical scholarship and apply them to document analysis and data from in-depth interviews with key actors, and other sources, to describe one eviction process as it is conceived between the standard operating procedure of the Western Cape Provincial Government as a landowner (with the Province and the City of Cape Town acting as governing bodies), the Sheriff as legal officer, and private security actors as enforcement, to understand the logistical imagination at work in planning evictions. I conclude by outlining how these point to a further dimension of South African logistical-racial politics within the eviction process itself and propose some pathways forward for the analysis of the convergences of logistics and eviction.

Logistical Orientations of Property

As a positioning of people in a property relation, eviction has an underexamined and necessarily logistical aspect. Research on law enforcement has lately recognised the manifestations of eviction enforcement (Cooper-Knock and Super 2022; Flierl 2025; Kimari 2024; Pozzi 2024) and it may be possible to consider eviction as part of sanctioned "violence work" which channels and organises state violence (Seigel 2018:11–12) and in South Africa, a site of "twilight policing" which legitimates itself through the iterative, performative work of non-state actors in policing roles (Diphoorn 2016:231). However, the study of the orchestration of eviction in the USA also reveals broader webs of commercial mobilities, including the use of dispossessed social groups in removals (Purser 2016). There is a need

for a distinct application of logistical critique: a title deed may circulate with laws, technologies, and even geo-politics sustaining it (Rogers 2016), but this circulation is distinct from the physical movement or circulation of a commodity (Bernes 2013:183). We may turn to the study of critical logistics to explain eviction because it rejects an "apolitical" science of mobility for a critical engagement with irrationalities and vulnerabilities in systems that produce it, and attention to moments of struggle within them (Chua et al. 2018:625–626). Accordingly, Marxist traditions have engaged in lively debate about the use of logistics as a point of struggle over mobility (Bernes 2013; Danyluk 2018; Hesse 2020; Toscano 2014), building on Henri Lefebvre's (2009:238) description of logistical space which acts "between pulverized spaces and spaces that have been reconstructed differentially" in the transformation of urban environments.

Logistics space differentiates bodies within capitalist trade, which conversely requires restricted and mandatory mobilities for workers and surplus labour. In a study of the Mesoamerica Project, a transnational infrastructure land corridor between the USA and South America, Alke Jenss (2024:510) argues that the facilitation of flows of capital is accompanied with a proliferation of technologies and practices of mobility control including immigration detention centres and military deployments resulting in the "[d]ispersion, re-routing, and re-victimising" of populations. Jonathan Silver (2023:152, 156) discusses how eviction is also a routine feature of the development of trade corridors in Central Africa, and, at the European border, Lorenzo Vianelli (2022:54) identifies "logisitification" as "a form of warehousing based on the depersonalisation and victimisation" of asylum seekers. We may also consider wars where "the capture, distribution, treatment, and physical labor of detainee populations come to shape the strategic and tactical contours of battlefield violence" as in the case of recognised prisoners of war (Nisa 2015:2279). These logistical readings resonate with Brickell's (2014:1259) reading of eviction and resistance in Cambodia as "intimate geopolitics" as it mobilises populations in service of economic and state objectives. As a biopolitical mechanism, logistics shares the border of war and commerce with eviction, concretising abstractions through applying value to life, producing relations of care and regulation, and logistical systems are themselves treated as "vital" entities that are perpetually threatened and must be made resilient through protection (Cowen 2014:214–215, 219).

This requires logistics' *necropolitical* shadow as a "*generalized instrumentalization of human existence and the material destruction of human bodies and populations*" (Mbembe 2020:68). From black chattel slavery (of which Cape Town was a node) (Anievas and Nişancıoğlu 2015:236–242), to mass incarcerations which manage a series of labour surpluses produced by the globalisation of the economy (Gilmore 2007), its history both informs and embodies the notion of *organised abandonment*: "the way in which organisations, state and otherwise, manage their activities in such a way so as to render groups of people irrelevant in their calculations, or alternatively with a purposeful intention to extract value" from them (Bhandar 2018:np; see also Gilmore 2008). As capitalist cognitive mapping (to borrow from Bernes [2013]:187]), logistics triangulates people in the axis of race and property. Attempting to articulate escape from this Lockean diagram, Stefano

Harney and Fred Moten (2021:14) write of logistics as a strategy to protect ownership by managing the inevitable decay of loss:

> All property is posited, beginning with the positing/positioning of a body for locating ownership, and the owned, and a mind for owning. The posit and the deposit inaugurate ownership as incorporation, whose inevitable end, given in continual withdrawal, is loss. This requires the production of a science of loss, which is to say the science of whiteness, or, logistics.

Beginning with the body, logistics seeks to arrange people within co-ordinates of ownership and intensified loss, producing race as "group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death" (Gilmore 2007:28), as possession is created through *dis*possession (Nichols 2020).

My coupling *eviction-logistics* therefore refers to a territorial enforcement of continually threatened "property space" which "situates the participants in any relation, specifies what the participants can do to each other, frames alternatives to transacting, and communicates powerful meanings to the participants" (Blomley 2020:43, 45). It also signifies my own orientations, my starting points (Cirolia and Pollio 2023:238); critical of property's present situations, a white scholar reading from outside the African context, accessing one route through the eviction process. A critical logistics of eviction emerges from within the science of logistics to examine these positionings of property.

Eviction in the Logistical City

Cape Town became a site for my investigation because of its visibility as a node of experimentation in eviction-logistics. The hegemony of the European property system in the Cape has its origins in the enclosure and allocation of land by the Dutch East India Company (VOC), blocking the passage of indigenous Khoe herders, to develop a port for the slavery and spice trades (Mellet 2021:117). The later shift from a logistical staging post to full-blown colony under British rule saw racial restrictions on property ownership and mobility flourish (Reddy 2015:99). Even as slavery ended in the Cape Colony in 1834, the reserve army of "free" black labour marked the start of informal settlement in the city, building an initial generation of communities in the central city that were evicted following an outbreak of bubonic plague in 1902, and by 1903 informal settlements were built in the eastern Cape Flats (Ngwenya 2023:5). In line with labour demands at the port, informal settlement in the post-World War II period grew (ibid.). If "[c]ontrol over the movement of labour was the weakest element of the pre-1948 system of segregation", then for white minority rule in the republic "[i]t also proved to be the single most intractable aspect of grand apartheid, particularly as increasingly coercive mechanisms were introduced to retard or reverse the process of urbanization" (Dubow 2014:61), especially through the Group Areas Act. Because Cape Town was not near to a designated "homeland", much of the "Black" and "Coloured" population was relocated to the townships of the Cape Flats, bifurcating the city along an implicit line which followed the original enclosure by the VOC (Mellet 2021:117). The emergent anti-apartheid critique of racial capitalism

recognised this effort to control labour through the racial differentiation of the population using space (Alexander 2023:103), while popular imagination of eviction today celebrates struggles against this process, for sites such as District 6 and Crossroads (Benson 2021), and continues to shape the forms land occupation takes, particularly in its use as a critique of existing regimes of privatisation and enclosure (Makhulu 2015:158–160).

The re-urbanisation of South African society has posed a specialised problem not only in quantitative terms but also in the qualitative promise contained within the end of apartheid that the defining features of racial discrimination, including spatial division of the urban populations, would be resolved. Property ownership has become the deciding policy instrument for post-apartheid restitution, yet just 44% of urban land was found to be owned by black citizens in a 2017 government audit (Delius and Beinart 2021:87) despite being the overwhelming majority. The introduction of constitutional protections and the Prevention of Illegal Eviction from and Unlawful Occupation of Land Act (PIE Act) in 1998 granted occupants and residents in urban housing protection against eviction without a court order. A burden of proof exists under the act that the eviction must be "just and equitable" and consider all relevant circumstances including the vulnerability of occupiers, with occupation periods of over six months requiring the court to consider if alternative housing or land has been made available by the state or municipality (Office of the President 1998)—something which has been interpreted to be a relevant factor in in *all* legal evictions under the act by advocates for occupiers (SERI 2016:30). This makes claiming occupation quickly a critical objective for land occupiers, one pursued through improvisational forms of shelter that often require their own (counter) logistical practice to assemble the things capable of being recognised as occupation from marking ground to connecting electricity (Levenson 2022:2; Makhulu 2015:161–163) as "urban dwellers' citizenship is not primarily enacted through radical protest but by everyday encounters with the state that are mediated through the physical provision (or not) of basic services" (Lemanski 2020:602; see also Von Schnitzler 2017).

After apartheid, following a national pattern, the policies of ANC (from 1998 to 2006/2009) and then Democratic Alliance (from 2006 in the city and 2009 in the province) governments in Cape Town and the Western Cape continued to struggle to house their population, with some estimates claiming the waiting list for the city now has approximately 347,000 people (Serra 2021). As Oldfield and Greyling (2015:1109) noted, the "post-apartheid" state expresses multiple contradictory faces while failing in its commitments to a reparative promise of housing. Land occupations for housing have become a symptom of this failure, and mediation of social movements and land occupiers to the state has been a central focus of research on eviction (Chance 2018; Desai and Pithouse 2004; Miraftab and Wills 2005; Weinstein 2021; Wilhelm-Solomon 2016) as have forms of communal banishment within informal settlements (Cooper-Knock and Super 2022), as well as studies of leadership structures which represent occupiers (Ngwane 2021). While occupations sometimes choose land which is deemed unsafe or in the path of a development project, a point often reflected in comments from city leaders when justifying either the reallocation of resources to the prevention of

occupations on grounds of flood prevention (e.g. Zille 2008), infrastructure (PMG 2020), or the eviction of existing occupants on the grounds of protecting the natural environment (Gillespie et al. 2021), policymakers mitigating for the failures of housing provision also promote the narrative of "land invasion" and "queue jumping", though in his detailed ethnography of eviction, Zach Levenson (2022:163) cautions that "as much as existing literatures tend to focus on how governments manage unruly surplus populations from above, the intelligibility of a given occupation *as* a population is never predetermined". As the tensions between the state and land occupiers coalesce around the state's interpretation of its role as guardian of private property rights and the repairer of apartheid-era injustices, inherited objectives of housing delivery and orderly provision intended to remedy dispossession in the past may also be *served by it* in the present (Levenson 2022:40).

This tension is symbolised in a rapid reactive shift in policing and monitoring land occupations in response to the PIE Act. The Municipality of Cape Town was one of the first to create an "Anti Land Invasion Unit" (ALIU) under the DA, a split duty between Community Safety and the Department of Human Settlements, who respond to possible land occupations and demolish structures before they are recognised as occupied under the act, while in the rest of the province, the South African Police Service (SAPS) is supposed to respond to invasions but only when they are reported (Kramer and Booi 2014; PMG 2020). In practice a patchwork of tenders and interdepartmental arrangements for both "preventative" actions and post-court evictions exists, in what Tessa Diphoorn (2016:125–128) describes as South Africa's "competing sovereignty" of private firms where the sanction of PSIRA, the Private Security Industry Regulatory Authority, is just one source of wider legitimacy. In 2022, the informal settlements division of the City of Cape Town Department of Human Settlements awarded a tender to two private security companies, the Red Ants and Mjayeli, reporting a budget value of R130,434,782.60 for the supply of security services for immovable property until 2025 (City of Cape Town 2022). The Western Cape Government, which holds land across the province as well as within the city boundaries, contracts circa R282,000,000 in tenders for security for property in its DHS, which is contested between security companies (Makhanya 2023), and includes monitoring, demolition, and rapid response to "invasions" (PMG 2022). While the Disaster Management Act that suspended court evictions in response to COVID-19 was in place, in October 2020 the Western Cape Department of Human Settlements (DHS) developed a flow chart of its "Standard Operating Procedure to Manage Land Invasions" (SOPMLI hereafter) on DHS land (DHS 2020), which maps out a series of response protocols. The development of this document punctuated a longer process, as since 2009 the Western Cape government's budget for land invasions went from 20 million Rand to 350 million, according to a DHS Asset Manager (Interview #005). Taking the SOPMLI as its starting point, this paper adds to the growing knowledge of how this patchwork of agencies perceive and plan eviction.

Eviction in the Cape developed in direct relation to the logistical spaces of colonialism, and as such is a tributary of the wider global logistical imaginaries of the

present (Cowen 2014:9). Contemporary narratives of invasion, and local state securitisation, certainly support the thesis that this history militarised the political imagination of South African law enforcement as a racial war on the poor (McMichael 2022:130). However, the analysis that follows also positions eviction-logistics in relation to the justifications and motives for eviction within state frameworks of reading, recognition, and decision about occupations described above. What mobilities enable these decisions and readings, and their posited outcomes? What are potential sites of infra-legal and infrastructural "procedures and practices that operate in the confines of the law, effectively encroaching, or at least risking encroaching, on a series of abuses and institutional violations" (Pozzi 2024:73) as identified in other eviction systems? And how does eviction-logistics replicate or challenge wider racial-logistical histories?

Reading Eviction-Logistics

Logistical readings begin to answer these questions because they eschew comprehensive accounts of phenomena for careful analysis of processes which are never fully localised or contained (Cowen 2014:18). Two key forms of investigation emerge: the first is the use of nodes and chokepoints in networked systems "as a telescope for exploring relationships and disjunctures across multiple spatial and temporal scales" (Carse et al. 2023:201), by tracking the movement of materials and knowledge. Though it inspired my focus on the city as a node in a project on the global eviction sector, this approach had increasing relevance to the practical local negotiation of research. Adapting to coincidence with COVID-19 and travel (and eviction) restrictions, I sought to maximise the use of two months of 2022 in Cape Town to develop research relationships and gather data under conditions where legal eviction was suspended. More anticipated were silences on eviction: I got no response to requests for interviews with the ALIU and city officials responsible for its management, despite being approved by the City of Cape Town's (many-months-long) access protocol. I turned instead to Beban and Schoenberger's (2019:80) use of "periscoping" in their study of Cambodian land grabs, which "not only reveals cloistered objects through their leakages, it is generative of new epistemologies that allows us to understand the object itself differently", identifying other critical individuals and institutions, investigating those people and sites through which eviction processes had to pass to gain a view of distant and past events.

I combined this with the second key method of logistical reading: accompanying chains or flows of materials and goods through systems (e.g. Khalili 2021:28; Zeiderman 2021). Property scholars have similar methodologies to create narratives of the supply chain in title deeds and ownership (e.g. Arboleda and Purcell 2021; Rogers 2016). I focused on snowball sampling interviews to follow the movement of information and materials from those nodes I *was* able to access, through the eviction process, a practice I had previously used in the UK eviction sector and noted for its use in accessing hard-to-reach and elite populations or networks (Atkinson and Flint 2001; Cirolia and Pollio 2023), building on the generous guidance of fellow urban geographers and other experts in Cape Town. I

started by conducting online interviews with staff responsible for planning informality, monitoring vacant properties, and preventing "land invasions" in local government, particularly the Western Cape Provincial Government, and it was during this process that I was sent a copy of the Department of Human Settlement's SOPMLI (DHS 2020) which allowed me to reconstruct one pathway through the eviction process (shown below), on to the Sheriff (who ultimately did not make themselves available for an interview) to a security provider (who did). Interviews with representatives of the Socio-Economic Rights Institute (SERI) and Ndifuna Ukwazi, legal advocacy groups that work with people facing eviction from informal settlements, provided a critical voice which raised the violence of eviction, but minimised potentially extractive short-term relationships with the evicted. I also went on a paid tour of an informal settlement, arranged through a local academic who recommended a guide company based in the settlement. I decided in advance not to use data from this visit here; however, it implicitly informs the understanding of the challenges involved in evicting such sites. This paper is based on ten semi-structured in-depth audio recorded interviews lasting up to two hours with key actors, which discussed the planning, practice, and wider political contexts of evictions in the Western Cape province with a focus on the city of Cape Town, and this was combined with photographs, news articles, documents, and secondary reports. The analysis seeks to highlight the "fantasies of containment that order people into different categories of being" (Jenss 2024:496) in infrastructures, and what tools they seek to employ to materialise these "fantasies", as a road map to the messy outcomes of this process which future research might explore.

This raises the question of whose narratives are foregrounded in this paper. My orientation as an outsider facilitated my position to interview eviction security in ways South African scholars I spoke to during the research process said they could not. Interviewing the Red Ants, South Africa's largest eviction company, presented distinctive ethical challenges which extend beyond this paper. I ended up calling in directly and requesting an interview, which was followed by a welcome at their facility in Cape Town, where I undertook in-depth interviews with Theo Moses— their stated COO in 2022, the Managing Director of the Cape Town branch, and the director of their armed "Stabilization Unit", a trio who presented a racially diverse face to the company. I was also invited along on an "operation", an invite I declined, due to both institutional restrictions and wider ethical questions. Some scholars of eviction, notably Purser (2016), have used logistical interviews alongside participant ethnography, assisting with evictions as a member of a removals team or other technical workers. However, was I sidelining local critics by engaging directly with the Ants? Who was I responsible to if monitoring operations? Work on these actors, like other research, must not supplant a critique that derives its perspective immanently from the African context (Daley and Murrey 2022; Ratele 2019), and must avoid reducing African cities to spaces of violent otherness (Mbembé and Nuttall 2004). For instance, media representations of the Red Ants, such as Louis Theroux's *Law and Disorder in Johannesburg* for the BBC, and a report for the *Guardian* (Burke 2018), have used their activities as an example of the extremity of conditions in South Africa, with limited context of

colonial histories and the wider humanitarian apparatus of housing provision in which they operate.

The data gathered was subjected to a "periscopic" reading which aimed to mimic supply chain ethnographies, following routes and pathways the eviction took "through" transcripts and where it was entangled with other discourses and representations of resistance. Invariably this requires balancing the imaginary of the researcher against those described in the text: where interviewees made claims, I sought supporting evidence, nevertheless this work should not be read as an objective analysis of on-the-ground processes. The question in my research —how, not why, evictions took place—was not aimed at externally arbitrating on the scale of the violence involved in eviction, but on understanding the specificities of the ways eviction was conceptualised and materialised, and the implications for the origins of depotentiation and violence identified in more normatively framed critiques.

Flow Charts, War Rooms, and Land "Invasions"

This reading was undertaken through a process focused on the provincial Department of Human Settlements (DHS 2020) Standard Operating Procedure, assisted by the interviews with DHS staff. The SOPMLI is a flow chart in response to "land invasion" that can be used to follow the eviction process. Built around a Business Process Modelling framework, this document breaks down responses into *Start Events*, *End Events*, and rectangles called *Tasks*, connected by lines called *Sequence Flows*, which are split by diamond-shaped decision points called *Gateways*. The chart is divided into *Swim Lanes* to divide activities between different individuals and agencies. The Swim Lanes divide activities between the project manager and the field services division, reflecting an institutional conceptualisation between the "office" and the "field". The SOPMLI details 24 *Tasks* and *Gates*, usually questions, such as "[Is there a] Land Invasion?", which establish events as a fact within the flow. Here, I read the SOPMLI as part of the local state as the landowner's cognitive map of eviction-logistics from one vantage point.

The SOPMLI starts with the DHS project manager being notified of the possibility of a land invasion. This could be from security services patrolling the area, "community leaders", on-site contractors, the community liaison officer, and others. Is security already on site? If so, then they should be contacted within five minutes of the initial notification to verify the presence of land "invaders". If not, field services should be notified in a further five minutes (and followed up within 16 hours). The "swim lane" of duties then switches to field services. Some areas are monitored "hot spots", but for most, assessment must take place within two hours and requires a knowledge of the means land occupiers use. DHS staff look for signs of occupiers marking plots, building materials being left out, and groups of people moving (#007). Timing was described as vital: "We're called in, there's a possible invasion, we need to go out immediately. That's why there's no time for report writing. The report writing will come afterwards" (#007), said a representative member of DHS' settlement control and field services. The SOPMLI has the field services division drive by and see what they are dealing with, referring to

the DHS Project Manager (PM) for approval within five minutes of the assessment, and deciding an action plan together. If there is reason to progress towards removal, a case of trespassing should be notified with the Police Service (SAPS) within one hour of the Action Plan opening, and security deployed. This consists of two types of response: a monitoring team, two people in a vehicle, or a tactical team deployed with a "Nyala" (armoured truck) (#005), to notify and prevent any further construction of structures on the site. According to Buhle Booi, an organiser from Ndifuna Ukwazi (#002), in Cape Town law enforcement often takes disassembled, confiscated materials far from occupations to a site in Ndabeni, to be claimed. Finally Legal Services is notified for an interdict to prevent "invasion" or an eviction order, and at this point the SOPMLI document indicates —with a cloud-shaped box—that a Legal Services and State Attorney process must take place, and that the provincial government must go to court to secure an eviction.

The SOPMLI reflects a widespread concern with rapid prevention of settlements. At the time of research, the Disaster Management Act's suspension of eviction processes due to COVID-19 meant that occupiers could claim land indefinitely under PIE. A local government response to what mayoral committee member for security J.P. Smith described as the "broken" PIE Act (PMG 2020) saw the creation of a "war room" (#005) within the PROVJOCOM, the Provincial Joint Operations Committee co-chaired by a naval officer and police Major-General Andre Lincoln, based in the South Africa Police Service (SAPS) Joint Operational co-ordination centre of the Western Cape (PMG 2020; Witbooi 2020). This met every morning, at least during the winter months of 2020, and shared intelligence and information about the movements of possible land "invaders" among law enforcement, municipalities, and the province: "It wasn't necessarily human settlement properties. It was parks, it was … it was their business sites, it was their housing projects, it was everything … where you could occupy they would … they would occupy" (#005). The "war room" reflected a desire for clear command and control in perceived crisis when the law no longer prevented the loss of occupied sites, and where even "normally" the provincial authority was treated unfavourably in the courts "nine times out of ten" (#005). The SOPMLI flow chart is also divided into two periods, before and after the court process, which limits and directs actions *around* the legal decision, but also shows how the politics of the court and other decisions exist within an imaginary of a technical flow that requires material support. Here we may also make a similar break, between permitted "preventative" action, and legally sanctioned eviction *after* the court decision, while recognising these are mapped within a continuity.

The Sheriff

Where the court has awarded possession and "preventative" action does not apply, the SOPMLI states eviction should be passed to the High Sheriff or enforced directly if the law allows. For now, let us assume that the eviction is handled by the Sheriff: guidance from Harry van Nieuwenhuizen of the South African Board for Sheriffs outlines the legal obligations of the Sheriff and the possible

routes for using the service of a private security company. This short document details the legal provisions under which the Sheriff has a duty to execute a Court Order which specifies eviction and demolition and a framework for best practice. It also notes the "human suffering" that results from eviction (van Nieuwenhuizen 2017:2). Court Orders detail the steps and personnel the Sheriff is instructed to take, and the location and details of the properties the order concerns (wrong addresses are among the most frequent issues raised by NGOs like SERI [#001]). Prior to any major eviction, the guidance mandates the Sheriff to open an operational meeting with SAPS, the City Police, the tribal authority (where present), ambulance services, a City Council member, community representatives, provincial staff from Land Affairs, the security contractor and the applicant or landowner (van Nieuwenhuizen 2017:12–13). The DHS (2020) SOPMLI also specifies this meeting if the Sheriff is not needed, intended to incorporate the development of a plan, identification of structures and the ejectment process, as well as risk assessment and actions of different security and demolition firms contracted to the job; this is then followed by a shorter operational meeting (a similar process was described by the Red Ants [#008]). On eviction day, the guide also specifies the need for clear directions from the Sheriff, maintaining channels of communications with SAPS, how to read the court order clearly, and engagement with community leaders. It says there should be an opportunity to leave provided before physical removal takes place, and it describes how security companies are contracted by the Sheriff or the applicant seeking eviction. Harry van Nieuwenhuizen (2017:8–9) cautions that liability is substantial unless a court also orders the security company as "These security companies have a proven process to do evictions. The input of the sheriff in this process is limited. The security companies insist to follow their own procedure". As described by Diphoorn (2016:23), iterative and performative acts of policing help legitimate the sovereignty of private security in a particular sphere.

Private Security

This legitimacy emerges from decades of experience and logistical knowledge of organising the sanctioned force of eviction, and the market leader among the private eviction companies (indeed the only one to be named in the SABFS guidance and SOPMLI documents) are the Red Ants, who started in the late 1990s as a company called Wozani, founded by Johan Bosch, a farmer and infrastructural services contractor—activities they have continued. In need of uniforms for a relocation job, Red Ant lore is that Bosch visited a supply store and bought a set of matching red boiler suits (#008). Over the following years of eviction and relocation actions, the name "Red Ants" would first be applied by the press and then adopted by the company, with a claimed 12,000 staff nationally by 2022, often fluctuating with demand (#008). First active in Gauteng, the Ants began to operate in the Western Cape from 2017, expanding a facility in the Cape Town neighbourhood of Blackheath when the "land invasion" problem "spilled over" from the eastern provinces (#010). They claimed to have kept this site mothballed for many years previously (#008), and on my visit in May 2022, I saw a large barn

with a substantial parking lot, armaments storage and weapons facilities, and heard barking from kennels. As I arrived a queue of people waited outside for work, scrutinising documents and making phone calls. Eviction work is dangerous and encounters with other eviction crews show a fear of communal and criminal violent repercussion (Wilhelm-Solomon 2022:91–92).

I asked COO Theo Moses (#008), to talk me through the eviction process. He claimed a major eviction can involve 800–1,000 staff, with potentially weeks of planning: the Ants attend the preparatory meetings with the stakeholders prior to the eviction itself, and undertake a series of surveillance operations, observing the site several times in the weeks preceding the eviction. Moses described three divisions in eviction operations, where a "shield department", staff with basic security training and armed with a shield and protective helmet, protect the second crew, the "demolition department". These can be recognised by their crowbar and a red boiler suit and are responsible for demolishing and removing structures and materials from the site. In 2018, demolition crews generally earned the equivalent of US$10 a day (Burke 2018). Protecting these two is the "stabilisation unit", an armed tactical unit with shotguns and rubber bullets. These divisions are visible in aerial footage of Ants activities undertaken in Gauteng (Bornman and Nyoka 2020; New Frame 2020), where the shield team can be seen protecting the demolition team, as the demolition crew forms a chain of material movement taking objects off site.

Before the teams enter, the Ants said, they conduct surveillance, sending observation teams out and using drones to map the site, identifying the number of people and structures and their topography, as well as routes in and out (#008; #009). The director of the stabilisation unit (#009) noted that in the three-dimensional topography of informal settlements, dead ends in an eviction can mean death for the Ants, and routes with just one access point were deemed a "red flag", and he talked about identifying "red zones", areas of hostile activity, and "green zones" of safety. According to Moses, for whom to experience an eviction was totally different to describing it, hostile response from the community was perceived by the Ants to be a potentially mortal danger, and many times "you go, and you do an eviction, but you don't know if you're coming out" (#008).

Sustaining the manual labour involved in eviction requires its own supply chains and mobility solutions. Catering alone is a challenge, with food and water needed for the different crews involved, and if the eviction takes place in Gauteng, the Ants use a farm to accommodate staff overnight to make a timely arrival at the site (#008). A fleet of vehicles, mostly "bakkies" (pickup trucks) and cars, a range of which were parked in the garage at Blackheath, transport the crew around, along with excavators for the eviction (#008). Armoured vehicles help to transport shield teams and stabilisation unit officers in and out of the site and allow for a secure position to recoup or fire rounds: while the older "Nyala" from the early 1990s has been used in the past, a recent upgrade has been made to the TFM-WP1800 (Figure 1), a vehicle designed specifically for South African policing operations. TFM's launch announced the new capabilities, including thermal imaging equipment, sonic crowd-control devices, secure storage for weapons, and a full

Figure 1: TFM-WP1800 vehicles parked at the Red Ants Blackheath site (author's photo, 2022)

HVAC system for purifying air (Martin 2016). The vehicles lift on a hydraulic 4 × 4 system when negotiating rough terrain. Wire cutters on the roof and specialist tyre design mean that the improvised electrical systems and broken detritus of informal settlements do not prevent the vehicle from moving. I experienced a tremendous sense of power and height as it rolled through the roads and rough ground of the Blackheath periphery on a demonstration run (Figure 2).

Figure 2: The view from a Red Ants TFM-WP1800 in Blackheath, Cape Town (author's photo, 2022)

Figure 3: Photo collage of weapons and ammunition in storage at Blackheath (author's photos, 2022)

The stabilisation unit use "non-lethal" rounds and flashbangs (#009), sourced from a local supplier in Cape Town, Industrial Cartridges Limited (Figure 3; #008). Weapons are supposed to be checked, cleaned, and stored securely both when not in use and in transit, which influences the choice of vehicles and facilities available to the Ants (the WP1800 includes a secure gun locker). Training facilities for the Ants include Ekurhuleni Shooting and Training Academy (ESTA), a site where private and public policing agencies and security services for mining and infrastructure practise in simulated informal settlements and specialist ranges (#008; ESTA 2023).[1] These measures protect the vital logistical chains which remove people and materials from the site of the eviction and in turn they also demand their own supply chains and warehousing practices.

The tactical decisions around eviction on the day are imagined as protecting flows of bodies and routes in and out of the site, focused on a simple process: enter a space, remove people and structures, and exit securely. But the fantasia of logistics is always composed on a "kludge of protocols and technicities that are never optimal but work for now, until they don't" (Simone 2022:85) and a "messy" form of work that fills in the gaps which produces a secondary knowledge regime within the technical operation of a system and binds it (ibid.), and each decision may expose security or the public to injury or death.

This becomes clear when violence emerges. The Ants claim to adopt a "zero tolerance" approach to force from the community, working with public order police "to get the job done and get out of the area as quick as possible" (#009), while opponents accuse them of violent and reckless actions. According to a lawyer for the Socio-Economic Rights Institute (SERI) (#001), the physical force of the Ants during evictions added to potential for personal property damage and loss for occupiers when Ants cleared buildings. Red Ants operatives have been accused

of attacks with demolition tools and sexual assaults (Gillespie et al. 2021), and they had their PSIRA licence suspended in 2019 after the death of two people during an eviction in Johannesburg (Dlamini 2019). A 2020 demolition of "unoccupied structures" in Knysna monitored by the South African Human Rights Commission led to community resistance and physical defence in which one person lost an eye after someone shot them with a rubber bullet; the municipality acknowledged it didn't follow the full community engagement processes after a decision that the shacks were unoccupied and the strength of feeling did not require consultation (Booysen 2022). Though official discourses may blame violence on a failure of protocol and interpretation of a site, or use security as "a shield from accountability" (McMichael 2022:109) for violence against the black urban poor, eviction-logistics mobilises divisions of labour and materials that locate and shape the affordances available to eviction workers, including those whose authority rests on the threat or enactment of sanctioned "violence work" (Seigel 2018:12) to protect property.

Feeling Logistical

> Eviction is emotion.
>
> —Red Ants Managing Director, Western Cape (#010)

Eviction-logistics therefore produces and requires intuitions and feelings among eviction workers which may surprise the uninitiated. Alongside good character and references, a distinctive expression of *love* emerged in an interview with the Red Ants stabilisation unit director about what made for a good team member when negotiating with and removing residents:

> And some communities, like I say, when you enter this … this already … they are already boiling temperature, so to speak … We are there to … to provide a professional service so far as possible, and like I say, these guys, they must … they must love what they are doing, and that is the only way they can do it to the best of their ability. (#009)

Anger or frustration from the evicted clashing with professional demands impacted others in the process, like DHS field services staff:

> But it all stresses me out, breaking down structures, and you know those people work hard for this money. Some of them are struggling, you know, getting grants, and you've got to go and break down their structures. People crying on the road, saying they've got no place to sleep. But yet, I'm doing my job. I need to protect the land. Those are the stresses that I face on a daily basis as well. (#007)

The Red Ants also talked about themselves publicly (Burke 2018), and in my interviews, as "a family". The stabilisation unit director spoke about a broad "love for the game or the love for the job" necessary for the unit alongside expected military and security experience, and when asked, he affirmed that counselling was also available to members of the unit. The Ants also hold funerals for members

who die in the line of duty. Nowhere is this vision of community more visible than in a memorial held for the founder Johan Bosch, where Ants spoke alongside Bosch's family and local government officials (Alberton Suid 2021), and in a plaque to him in the Blackheath office, still overseeing the business of the day including the interviews I was conducting. Further work to understand the function of "love" and "family" within this context and the specificity of South African masculinity (e.g. Meth 2009; Ratele 2013) may be illuminating, and the presentation and modulation of the masculine body has been explored among other armed response security workers in South Africa (Diphoorn 2015). Eviction-logistics paradoxically generates a series of reproductive imaginaries and emotional attachments such as love, protection, and family, as "logistical feelings" like those described by Cowen (2014:214–215, 219) begin to shape the eviction process.

Conclusion

Eviction necessarily positions people in a property relation as possessors and dispossessed, allocating loss to the evicted. As a science of loss, logistics inscribes race into property by organising abandonment: eviction therefore retains an irreducible logistical element, and as the South African experience and critique of racial capitalism shows, is a potential mechanism for the prosecution of racial violence. While eviction and logistics sustained one another throughout colonial and apartheid eras, in the new constitutional order where dispossession may serve both the promised orderly "delivery" of housing (Levenson 2022:40) and the depotentiation of urban occupants and alternatives (Wilhelm-Solomon 2021), eviction is a point where the racial-logistical history of a property relation appears vividly, as decisions must still be made about what must be positioned, protected, and lost.

Logistical reading therefore offers additional tools for recognising sources of instrumentalisation and abandonment within eviction processes. Eviction-logistics in the Cape envisions materials, people, weapons, equipment, and knowledge mapped in flows that must be protected and cared for as they assert positions within a property relation, while land occupation appears as an invasion, ingress, or spillover that must be guarded against to prevent loss. Flows signify perceived sources, scales, and sanctions of violence in eviction and what or who needs protecting, while also distributing decisions and affordances across multiple points of data and chains of command and supply. Technical time-critical protocols and policing actions seek to evade and then respond to rights that can be claimed through the PIE Act, and the crisis perceived in the suspension of legal eviction during COVID-19 has led to further extension of instruments of command and control and cross-institutional collaboration. Eviction is not a predetermined response to occupations, but it must be made *possible*: loss and possession is allocated not only by legal and political decisions, but through the preparation and mobilisation of the resources that enable claims and counter-claims.

Eviction research must therefore consider more deeply the lives of those caught in the transformations of eviction-logistics and forms of reproductive futurity and community they generate. A recent commentary by Wangui Kimari (2024) on

evictions in Nairobi uses the testimony of urban majorities to reveal the infrastructural role of street-level policing in African cities in preserving the unequal fabric of urban life. While the resistance and counter-logistical practices of land occupiers has been documented, missing from my narration and others are questions posed from the perspective of the people who work for and live around this secondary economy of eviction, such as demolition crews and maintenance staff, and the ambiguities of counter-logistical practices, for instance labour organising, communal refusal, or sabotage, that may emerge and dissent from within the stigmatised labour and infrastructural spaces of eviction. Considering the global circulations and politics of property requires us to understand the (re)generative effects of the technical imaginaries of eviction. For scholars, monitors, and activists, recognising the logistics enabling eviction requires us to redraw the boundaries of observation, and to look beyond legal decisions and their impacts to politicise the technical processes that sustain property-making.

Acknowledgements

Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings will be available in University of Sheffield ORDA at https://doi.org/10.15131/shef.data.24032211.v1 following an embargo from the date of publication to allow for publication of research findings.

Endnote

[1] Writing from the US, Stuart Schrader (2024) argues the spatial form of the police training facility "organizes abandonment".

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Appendix

List of participants directly quoted in this article (Interview Files "The Globalisation of Eviction Enforcement" available at the University of Sheffield: https://doi.org/10.15131/shef.data.24032211.v1).

#001—Lawyer, Socio-Economic Rights Institute.

#002—Buhle Booi, Political Organiser, Ndifuna Ukwazi.

#005—Senior Official, Property and Asset Management, Western Cape Government Department of Human Settlements (DHS).

#007—Official, Field Services, Western Cape Government DHS.

#008—Theo Moses, COO, Red Ant Eviction and Relocation Services.

#009—Stabilisation Unit Manager, Red Ant Eviction and Relocation Services.

#010—Managing Director for the Western Cape, Red Ant Eviction and Relocation Services.