

TITLE: Hijacks and death traps in a crumbling South African city centre

AUTHOR: Samantha Granville

PUBLISHED DATE: 3 September 2023

SOURCE: BBC News

URL: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-66695688>

## Article Summary

The city center of Johannesburg, South Africa, is deteriorating, with dilapidated buildings that have been taken over by criminals and property gangs who rent them out illegally. One of these buildings recently caught fire, resulting in the death of 76 people and numerous injuries. The overcrowded and unsafe conditions in the city center have been exacerbated by a housing shortage since the end of apartheid in 1994. The Prevention of Illegal Eviction Act in South Africa makes it difficult to evict squatters from hijacked buildings, as alternative accommodation must be provided. Critics argue that the city has failed to address the issue and that the law protects criminals. There have been calls for increased inspections of public buildings and the deportation of illegal immigrants living in these buildings. However, rights groups argue that many of these tenants are victims who are desperate for affordable housing. President Cyril Ramaphosa has called for a thorough investigation but has not specified any government actions. The situation highlights the dire living conditions and lack of affordable housing in Johannesburg's city center.

## Article Analysis

1. Does the article give a political economy contextual analysis of the event?

No, the article does not provide a political economy contextual analysis of the event. It primarily focuses on the conditions of the hijacked buildings and the tragic fire that occurred.

2. What according to the article, is/are the root cause/s of the event?

According to the article, the root cause of the event is the hijacking of buildings by criminals and property gangs who illegally rent out the space to people who cannot afford housing elsewhere. The overcrowded, dangerous, and unsanitary conditions in these buildings contributed to the tragedy of the fire.

3. Does the article present evidence of complicity between Johannesburg councillor representatives and organised criminal syndicates that took over the control of the building?

No, the article does not present evidence of complicity between Johannesburg councillor representatives and organised criminal syndicates that took over the control of the building.

4. Does the article present evidence of NGOs (like SERI) engaging with organised criminal syndicates that took over the control of the building, on behalf of and in the interests of their clients (i.e. the tenants)?

No, the article does not present evidence of NGOs like SERI engaging with organised criminal syndicates that took over the control of the building on behalf of the tenants.

5. Does the article present potential solutions to the occupation by tenants of a hijacked building that has degenerated into a slum?

The article does not explicitly present potential solutions to the occupation of hijacked buildings. However, it does mention that authorities say they are unable to meet the cost of new affordable housing needed and that inspections of public buildings could be done to improve the lives of the people living in these buildings.

6. Does the article emphasise the conflictual relationship between city officials and the NGO SERI (and other NGOs) regarding different interpretations of the rights of tenants in terms of the law and specifically in terms of the PIE Act?

No, the article does not emphasize the conflictual relationship between city officials and NGOs like SERI regarding different interpretations of the rights of tenants.

## Critical Analysis

The article titled "Hijacks and death traps in a crumbling South African city centre" by Samantha Granville, published on 3 September 2023 on BBC News, addresses the issue of dilapidated buildings and unsafe living conditions in Johannesburg's Central Business District. The article provides an overview of the situation and includes quotes from various individuals and perspectives.

The author's language and tone throughout the article are generally neutral and do not exhibit any evident bias. However, there are a few instances where subjective language or phrases may shape the reader's perception. For example, in the opening paragraph, the author describes the appearance of the buildings with phrases like "brink of collapse," "foul smell," and "overcrowded, dangerous". These descriptions, while reflecting the dire conditions, may carry a subjective tone that could implicitly influence the reader's opinion.

Additionally, the author includes personal experiences and quotes from residents living in the hijacked buildings. One quote from Molly, a resident, describes living conditions as being "like living in a prison". While this quote adds a personal perspective, the use of such subjective language may introduce bias into the article.

The author also presents different perspectives on the issue, including that of Angela Rivers, the general manager at Johannesburg Property Owners and Managers Association, and Kenny Kunene, a member of the opposition Patriotic Alliance. Both individuals express criticisms of the South African government and its handling of the housing problem. While the article includes these differing views, the author does not provide a full analysis or evaluation of these perspectives, which might limit the reader's understanding of the issue.

Overall, the article provides a comprehensive overview of the problems faced by residents of hijacked buildings in Johannesburg. While some subjective language and quotes may introduce a degree of bias, the author presents different viewpoints to offer a well-rounded picture of the issue.

## Contradiction Analysis

One contradiction in the news article is the portrayal of illegal immigrants as both victims and criminals. Kenny Kunene, a member of the opposition Patriotic Alliance, argues that the anti-eviction law "protects criminals" and suggests mass deportation of immigrants living in the buildings. However, the article also states that many of these tenants are desperate people who will pay money for shelter and are victims themselves. This contradiction highlights the conflicting views on the role of illegal immigrants in the housing crisis.

Another contradiction in the article is the criticism of the government's failure to address the housing problem while acknowledging the challenges posed by eviction laws. Angela Rivers, the general manager at Johannesburg Property Owners and Managers Association, criticizes the city for refusing to tackle the problem and states that officials should use their powers to improve the lives of people living in these buildings. However, the article also mentions that authorities say they are unable to meet the cost of new affordable housing needed and their hands are tied by eviction laws. This contradiction suggests a complex situation where the government faces financial constraints and legal barriers in addressing the housing crisis.

Additionally, there is a contradiction between President Cyril Ramaphosa's call for a thorough investigation to ensure no future tragedies and the absence of any specific steps mentioned in the article that the government would take. While Ramaphosa acknowledges the need to address the housing situation, the lack of concrete actions mentioned in the article raises questions about the government's commitment to addressing the issue.

Overall, these contradictions highlight the complexities of the housing crisis in Johannesburg and the challenges faced by both the government and the residents living in unsafe and overcrowded buildings.