

TITLE: What are Johannesburg's hijacked buildings?

AUTHOR: Lucy Fleming

PUBLISHED DATE: 1 September 2023

SOURCE: BBC News

URL: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-66674284>

Article Summary

The South African city of Johannesburg has many buildings that are deemed unfit to live in. These buildings, abandoned by owners or authorities, are taken over by criminal gangs who rent them out to families. The buildings lack basic amenities like running water, toilets, and legal electricity connections, and are often overcrowded. Fires are common in these buildings due to unsafe cooking practices and illegal electricity connections. The recent fire in a five-storey building resulted in the deaths of more than 70 people.

Johannesburg's city centre, once a bustling business district, has become a dangerous area with high levels of crime. The city's history of apartheid and its legacy of housing shortages contribute to the issue. Johannesburg authorities have made efforts to rejuvenate the CBD and rehouse some residents, but derelict buildings remain and criminal syndicates take advantage of the desperate need for accommodation. Despite the challenges and dangers, the occupants of hijacked buildings see them as a roof over their heads and an opportunity for a better future.

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 focuses more on the living conditions and history of the buildings in Johannesburg.

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

According to the article, the root causes of the event are the abandoned buildings being taken over by criminal gangs, lack of basic amenities such as water and electricity, and the high levels of poverty and inequality in South Africa.

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

The article does not present direct evidence of complicity between Johannesburg councillor representatives and 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)?

The article does not present evidence of NGOs like SERI engaging with the organized criminal syndicates 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 present potential solutions to the occupation by tenants of hijacked buildings. It mainly focuses on the current living conditions and challenges faced by the occupants.

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?

The article does not emphasize the conflictual relationship between city officials and the NGO SERI.

Critical Analysis

Overall, the news article provides a detailed and informative account of the situation in Johannesburg's hijacked buildings. However, there are a few potential biases or subjective language that can be identified:

1. The use of the word "horrific" in describing the fire that killed more than 70 people may imply a subjective judgment about the event's severity.
2. The phrase "abandoned by their owners or the city authorities" suggests a lack of responsibility on the part of the authorities, potentially implying negligence or a failure to address the issue of hijacked buildings.
3. The author refers to "criminal gangs" multiple times, which could imply a negative association between the occupants of these buildings and criminal activity without providing the full context or evidence.
4. The use of the term "shack-like structures" implies a negative and potentially biased description of the living conditions in these buildings.

5. The author includes a personal account from an individual who escaped the fire but emphasizes their desire to remain anonymous due to living in the buildings illegally. This emphasis could potentially reinforce negative stereotypes or stigmatization of the occupants.
6. The article includes historical context about apartheid and racial segregation, which is relevant but could be seen as tangential to the main focus of the article.
7. The mention of "fortune-seekers" among migrants implies a possibly negative connotation, suggesting that some migrants are motivated solely by economic reasons rather than seeking refuge.
8. The statement that Johannesburg is a "no-go area with a reputation for crime and violence" may contribute to a negative perception of the city without providing a balanced view of its overall situation.
9. The article uses the term "hijacked" to describe the occupied buildings, which could be seen as a loaded term with a negative connotation that criminalizes the occupants.
10. The article highlights the challenges faced by the governing African National Congress in addressing the housing shortage but does not provide alternative perspectives or solutions to the issue.

It is important to note that these potential biases may be unintentional or the result of space constraints in the article.

Contradiction Analysis

1. The article states that the buildings are "deemed unfit to live in" but also mentions that families are living in these buildings and paying rent to criminal gangs who run them. This suggests a contradiction in the evaluation of the buildings' habitability.
2. The article mentions that the buildings lack running water, toilets, or legal electricity connections, but later states that there are numerous illegal electricity connections rigged up to provide power for those inside. This suggests a contradiction regarding the availability of electricity in the buildings.

3. The article mentions that the occupants of these buildings are there illegally and tend to shun the authorities and media, but later mentions that property owners must offer alternative accommodation to the building's occupants before evicting them, even if they are undocumented migrants. This suggests a contradiction regarding the legal rights and protections of the occupants.
4. The article states that the buildings are often referred to as "hijacked," suggesting that criminal syndicates have taken control of them. However, it also mentions that some buildings are owned by the council and tied up in legal wrangles. This suggests a contradiction regarding the ownership and control of the buildings.
5. The article acknowledges that Johannesburg's CBD has faced efforts to rejuvenate, with some parts being redeveloped through private investment. However, it also states that derelict buildings have proliferated, owned by the council and tied up in legal wrangles. This suggests a contradiction regarding the success and effectiveness of the rejuvenation efforts.