

**Knowing your place:  
Urban services and new modes of governability  
in South African cities**

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“The organization of social relations demands mapping so that people know their place...the power to map the world in one way or another is a crucial tool in political struggles” (Harvey 1996, 112).

“The party leaders behave like common sergeant majors, frequently reminding the people of the need for ‘silence in the ranks.’ This party that used to call itself the servant of the people’s will, as soon as the colonial power puts the country into its control, hastens to send the people back to their caves” (Fanon 1968, 183).

### **1. Placing and hegemonic power<sup>1</sup>**

Place is a multi-layered concept. It is used here to refer firstly to a ‘socio-spatial’ structure with material, social, geographic and symbolic bounding. Knowing one’s station, living within one’s means, and one’s standard of living all resonate with knowing one’s place in the socio-economic order. Place construction occurs as a material, financial, symbolic, political and social process that involves struggles, defeats and victories both in the world of work and residence. Different socio-geographic areas produce different kinds of labour power and opportunities for social mobility. Symbolic designations attach to certain places as dangerous, inferior, polluted, liberated, ungovernable etc (see Bullard, 1992 for accounts of environmental racism). But “place” as Williams (cited in Harvey 1996, 29) argued, “has been shown to be a crucial element in the bonding process- perhaps more so for the working class”. Place is also crucial especially as a marketable exchange value for middle-class homeowners and property speculators – a source of exclusionary communitarian politics (otherwise called nimbyism).

Keeping different kinds of people in their assigned places and helping them to know their place is a general ambition of states whether neoliberal or welfare capitalist. This is extensively covered in a wide-ranging literature on state-society relations and the historical welfare state

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<sup>1</sup> Hegemony means to suffuse society by leading it. It involves more than material force but moral, intellectual leadership and prestige.

systems (Painter, 1995; Gill, 2003; Young, 1994; Scott, 1998). In the post-colonial, post-national liberation context, a key ambition of states has been to become integral states – possessing “perfected hegemonies” (see Young, 1994, 39) and part of this is having people “in place”.

South Africa’s old regime had its own methods for keeping people in place (Group areas, pass laws, separate amenities and prisons); the new South Africa had to develop these. In 1980’s South Africa, despite extreme state violence and militarized townships, people could not be stopped from transgressively being “out of place”. Places like the townships, designed to control the flow of black labour and the unemployed were rendered ungovernable. At this time, the promise of liberation also unleashed euphoric ideas of possible other worlds (such as people’s power and local democratic self-rule).

After the 1994 ‘settlement’, the masses had to be demobilised, deactivated and then their energy redirected and reconstituted in new places and new ways -- a task the ANC is still trying to achieve. It set itself up as a society in transition but the ANC had set itself the goal of being national liberator enjoying massive and active support and loyalty of the people. In this regard, South Africa’s new ruling group has fallen far short of its overstated designs (see the failed *Masakhane* campaign and the *Batho Pele* principles). Yet the project of re-organising domination to make it sustainable and yet friendly for capital accumulation -- and the illusory confidence that it can indeed put people in place even as they constantly ‘wiggle out’ and create their own spaces -- continues. Here service delivery continues to play a special role in local, symbolic and national politics, but especially for ‘placing’ various designated groups of people, whether they be inner-city slum dwellers, shack-dwellers or existing township residents.

The consolidation of this process of creating a “popular capitalism” is proving much harder for the ANC, than was anticipated and all sorts of stresses and strains are now showing inside the ANC, in communities and inside the state. Nevertheless, after ten years of experimenting, there is a coherent set of state strategies taking shape for how to rule consensually over different people in an everyday sense. Using the rhetoric of participation, ownership, empowerment and sustainability, service delivery for the state is more than technical exercise. It is also about trying

to maintain legitimacy, winning hearts and minds, encadrement and teaching people about new ways of living in a 'modern market' society.<sup>2</sup>

The focus in this paper is about hegemonic places as produced state spaces and sites of difference (Harvey 1982; Harvey 1996, 322;) in relation to services like water and electricity. It looks at technologies of social control and the ways the state may seek to construct order, and 'sustainable' (read controllable) communities (no doubt often in relation to 'intransigent' communities that may disrupt and re-appropriate spatial orderings and controlling technologies).

I focus on urban services since these exemplify many socio-spatial and political processes. Services partly affect these, and there are many other socio-geographic aspects of class reproduction and social control from housing to education and so on that need to be considered. Services are, however, part of the day-day routine (the daily round); they link citizens to the state (especially the local state) or the market depending on whether services are privatised or not. The "how of services" (public or private or quasi-public; citizen entitlement or commodity); at what level of service (basic or full); at what prices are they delivered and their geography are crucial issues. Politically, services are part of the interface of low (everyday politics) and high politics (parties, elections etc) and in South Africa (recall the 1980's services boycotts) they are highly political. They are supposed to transform people's lives; bring life and dignity, they carry a heavy symbolic meaning because service delivery makes up a major part of the promise of ANC to liberate "our people". Services need to be considered as engineered flows/metabolic processes with nature that shape human activity. A modern house without convenient water, and sewerage, one without electricity means hours spent in the daily round on gathering wood, fetching water and disposing of water. The supply of these services by the state can change this pattern. For these reasons the study of service delivery seems important for understanding broader society.

Modern urban water and sanitation are pre-eminently examples of built networks – collective means of transporting water and waste matter, supplied to groups of people in specific geographic locales through long-lasting pipes, pumps etc (pipes may last 50-100 years( Goubert 1986)). As

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<sup>2</sup> Gramsci (1971, 259) talks of an extended state ... a vehicle for 'educating consent.'

much as they are engineered forces of production, they also have engineering implications for social relations. The levels of supplying these services (basic or intermediate) to discrete places have major social implications over a long term, representing a peculiar kind of bounded institutionalisation or permanence that freezes certain social patterns in place.<sup>3</sup> But more than this, commodified water is also a certain set of internalisations as opposed to only external constraints and power. As Mitchell (1991, xi) explains:

“Power is usually imagined as an exterior restriction...and it operates by setting limits to behaviour, establishing negative prohibitions and laying down channels of proper conduct. Disciplinary power by contrast works not from the outside but from the within...at the level of detail...and not by restricting actions but by producing them. Disciplines work within local domains and institutions. These methods produce the organised power of armies, schools and factories (and) they also produce the modern individual, constructed as an isolated, disciplined, receptive and industrious political subject. Disciplines can break down, offering spaces for manoeuvre and resistance”.

Drawing on Mitchell’s observations, I focus on four interconnected recent ‘modes of governability’ and mappings by the state that bear on the question of standards of living and services. First, I look at the creation of new classes/categories of consumers linked to ‘sustainable’ infrastructure levels. Second, I look at prepaid meters, third at Free Basic Water (FBW) and lastly at tricklers. While this may seem overly microscopic or even technical, and certainly not the normal focus for big politics, I hope to show its relevance for a molecular understanding of new ways to put people in their place. These four political strategies affect material life and culture but attempt to render people governable, i.e. visible. They form part of broader systems of encadrement and patronage by which the ANC

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<sup>3</sup> Goffman’s (1961: 1-8) suggestion that “a total institution may be defined as a place of residence...(with) a large number of like-situated individuals, cut off from wider society...together lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life” in “prison-like” places in which a particular kind of activity regularly goes on; ... (in which) “the institution captures something of the time and interest of its members” seems a fecund idea to apply to physical infrastructure like water and sanitation. As a form of enforced activity the institution is “a barrier to social intercourse; it imposes social distance” (with) “each grouping tend(ing) to conceive as the other in terms of narrow, hostile stereotypes...even talk across boundaries may be conducted in a special tone of voice”.

attempts to create small privileges at the grassroots be it a seat in a ward committee or a job in a public works program or a rewards and prize for being a nation builder. The crux of this paper is to explore the attempted remaking of disciplined subjects within the complex institutional entanglements of municipal service delivery, marketization and the ANC's national liberation discourse. Supplying regular services to the poor involves "power effects" such as a range of surveillances, controls, punishments, empowerments and procedures all which have to be more or less continuously monitored at the local level. New statistical reporting requirements reflect these state imperatives. I show that new procedures for municipal services involve re-regulating the poor, new ways of dividing up populations (into can pays, can't pays and won't pays) and by new spaces of consumption (defined levels of services for defined populations) and specific modes of consumption for specific areas. Corresponding to the state's governability effort, the poor try to escape the net of the state, committing their own petty frauds and sometimes, popular illegalities. The focus in this paper is not on the equity/justice debate or the extent of or "efficiency" of service delivery in South Africa (see Bond 2000a and 2000b), but more on the mode of provision and the accompanying political-cultural surveillances and side effects that are intentionally and unintentionally crafted, discovered and produced.

An emphasis on modes of provision and consumption, on political conditionalities and on types of urban social order and disorder ties into the wider problem of state-citizen relationships and governing populations and also suggest new forms for the poor to disengage from the state and new subversive solidarities (Desai 2002; Olukajo 2004).

## **2. South Africa's neoliberalism of a special type**

Neoliberalism as an ideal type has the same basic ideas everywhere, but in every country it has to fight for its own popularity and credibility, its own local idiom, and it evolves unique forms, creating what Jessop calls 'actually existing neoliberalism (Jessop, 2002).<sup>4</sup> The broad methods and

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<sup>4</sup> "Its success depends of promoting new ways of representing the world, new discourses, new subjectivities that establish the legitimacy of the market economy, the disciplinary state and enterprise culture. To stabilise neoliberalism, intervention at the urban scale is ...essential, because this is where neoliberalism has its most significant economic, political

principles for South Africa's service delivery and encadrement to what I term "neoliberal-populism" have evolved and can be traced in the RDP, Masakhane, different White papers, electoral manifestos and laws (see Batho Pele, Municipal Systems Act and various recent Strategic Framework Documents). A key thrust of these documents is the move towards basic needs and rhetorical empowerment (but with the stress on the individual's role and reciprocity vis a vis services and the state). This is strongly tied to the heroic figure of the empowered citizen as the customer. The new ethical citizen is one who pays for services, only uses as much as she can afford and makes wise, sovereign and informed choices with her limited means (Dwaf 2003).

The new South Africa after ten years has evolved towards a current hybrid that combines elements of straightforward neoliberalism supported by a skeletal welfare system (grants, pensions, feeding schemes and free basic services) and emergency support schemes. The social void and disintegration of the state machine (especially the gutting of the public service since 1994) -- wrought by neoliberalism since GEAR -- has forced the state to step in with all manner of adhoc adjustments to the original neoliberalism plan. A permanent state of local emergencies and continual patch-ups has become a key feature. Semi-stability and encadrement have become possible through free basic services directed at the mass of the reserve army of labour. This is backed up with various encadrement schemes such as volunteerism ("letsema") and 'know your community campaigns'. Various emergency measures are also in place to prop up failing local administrations in half the country's municipalities (for instance, Project Consolidate). The ambitions of the initial neoliberal urban program (for example the White Paper on Local Government) have had to be cutback in the light of the social crisis around massive service disconnections, cholera and massive non-payment. Early privatizations have proven unworkable not least because the state itself has been too internally disorganised to 'come to the party' (McDonald and Ruiters 2005). Anti-neoliberal movements (inside the ANC and outside) have led uprisings forcing what can only be described as "local states of emergency" across the country. This said, the ANC's hegemonic project of a popular neoliberalism has not collapsed.

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and social impacts on everyday life" (Jessop 2002, 470).

Moreover, hegemonic projects, such as the ANC's cannot be abstracted from political economy: specifically the question of the production of the working class and social control over that class and the massive reserve army of labour. The question of the costs of reproducing labour power was been central to Marxist and neo-marxist debate on characterising the apartheid state. Yet, that frame remains useful if only for asking similar questions about the post-apartheid system. The current situation of huge numbers of unemployed people kept at bare subsistence and supported partly by wages and state grants is a fundamental factor in the way the built environment of services is being shaped. This has to be kept in mind when we examine service regimes for the poor later in this paper. The built environment as Harvey (2001, 82) insists, "internalizes within it the contradictory relations inherent in the accumulation of capital."

### **3. The governability logic of Free Basic Water: formalization and visibility of target populations.**

In September 2000, the President announced a new water dispensation that went beyond the RDP's promised life-line tariffs and cost recovery. Basic water would be free. We cite the state's extended justification for FBW:

The City of Durban has taken the logical - and socially just and equitable step - of making the first lifeline amount of water (6 000 litres per household per month) free-of-charge. Thereafter, the more you use, the more you pay. *This constitutes a significant saving in administrative and postage costs. It is a win-win situation for all. ...* In poor rural areas, ...we can simply provide water supplies without charging for them, which will be undoubtedly simpler. For this to be effective will require only discipline to avoid waste at taps and to prevent unauthorised and unmetered connections to the system (Dwaf 2000).

Cynically perhaps, the six kl per household just about equalled the administrative costs of billing (R7.00 at the time). Communal standpipe supply in villages would also be "free" since 200 litres (eight buckets per day) was more or less the amount a family could carry in a day. In urban areas, amounts consumed beyond the free basic water (FBW) quota would attract charges. The state believed that residents, thanks to FBW would

learn to take greater care of and 'ownership' of services; they would act wisely and responsibly. Rising block tariffs and increasing transfers to the local state would help cross-subsidize free basic water. By late 2004, FBW, the state claimed, reached half of the 29 million poor South Africans (Dwaf 2004, see [www.dwaf.gov.za/FreeBasicWater](http://www.dwaf.gov.za/FreeBasicWater)).<sup>5</sup>

FBW has many logics: some of these spelt out in direct terms by state managers in ways that are alarmingly frank.

Firstly, formalization; separation and visibility: urban households would have to be connected to a formal, *metered* water supply and would have to register as 'indigents' in order to qualify free water. We need to note that in 2001, once the politicians had had their say, the free basic water policy was explicitly referred to as a 'strategy' (Muller 2001, 14). 'To make it (FBW) work *only the really proven poor* should get these while anyone else should be forced to pay even at higher tariffs' (2001, 132). This was repeated in the 2003 Strategic Framework Paper:

"The adoption of free basic water policy has not negated...the principle of user pays. On the contrary, the free basic water policy strengthens the principle in that it clearly requires consumption in excess of the free water supply service to be paid for..." (Dwaf 2003, 29).

We also need to note that in 2001, when the free basic water was implemented it was also explicitly referred to as 'an innovative approach that will enable us to separate the can't pays from the won't pays' (Muller, 2001, 14). The won't pays category stretched from the wealthy to the poor with household incomes over R1500 per month (roughly \$250), i.e., the working poor.

Two years later, Mike Muller (Director General in charge of South Africa's water again clarified;

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<sup>5</sup> The state however omitted a few obvious other reasons for FBW. These were repeated cholera outbreaks, pressure from Cosatu and social movements, rising non-payment for services and local resistance and rebellions against services cut-offs. Bad sanitation, cut-offs, prepaid meters and restricted water supplies were blamed for over 118 000 reported cases of cholera, with 265 deaths in 2000-2001 (Deedat and Cottle, 2002). Three million people developed diarrhoea, a direct consequence of poor water and sanitation provision. Diarrhoea killed more than 50 000 South African children a year.

While the free basic water policy is heresy in some water circles, its implementation is already helping to promote accountability and good financial management in local government. The distinction between the ‘can’t pay’ and the ‘won’t pay’ is clarified and ‘free-riders’ with higher than basic levels of service more easily identified (Muller 2002).

As the Department of Finance put it, ‘Once municipalities are able to target poor households, they will be free to pursue more vigorously higher income households and businesses refusing to pay’ (2003, 44). Illegal connections would disqualify the household, and failure to pay would result in a user’s supply being restricted to six kl or prepaid meters being installed. Secondly, revenue: under cover of FBW, municipalities also dramatically increased their charges for amounts over six kl.

#### **4. The state and market inside the community and the household: paternalistic right-sizing consumers to “sustainable” poverty.**

From about 1999, it became clear to the state that many of its coercive interventions (disconnections for example) and exhortations were failing. A pro-active and strategic approach for managing the poor in more sophisticated and less intrusive ways was thus required, if the state wished to avoid a head on collision with the mass of poor people. Thus, it shifted from disconnections to restricted services and targeted interventions, which would separate those who simply could not pay. Restricted water answered the state’s call for ‘policies and procedures should seek to *avoid* the accumulation of bad debts and high costs associated with restrictions or disconnections and reconnections’ (see Dwaf, 2003, 37).

State policy in practice began to shift once free basic services were announced. The poor would receive their free water rations; the ‘non-poor’ would pay more (for graphic descriptions of tricklers see Loftus 2005, 194). Consumers henceforth would be right-sized to services commensurate with their estimated ‘market power’. The shift to *lower* water meant a lower living standard in urban areas because 20 kl per household had been the average. FBW serves to intensify interventions to ‘right-size’ households deemed to be on too high a level of existing services. ‘Rightsizing’ has meant that the state can withdraw existing high-

level services. Downsizing has taken several forms which I will further elaborate.

The state argued, that 'while government can provide "some for all" we cannot provide unlimited supplies to all. We understand that 6 000 litres per month is less than many people aspire to' (Kasrils 2003). The state acknowledges that 20-30kl is the average for black urban townships (Department of Finance 2003).

In Durban 'normal' households were expected to use 30 kl per month, or just over R200 (\$30) per month ([www.durban.gov.za/eThekweni/Services/water\\_an.../Water\\_Tariffs](http://www.durban.gov.za/eThekweni/Services/water_an.../Water_Tariffs)). Poor (or abnormal) households using more than six kl per month would be adversely affected due to the punitive increase in tariffs after the free 6 kl. Note that the higher rate ... impacts directly on poor households whose consumption exceeds six kl. (Department of Finance, 2003, p. 222. In Durban, once households used above the free limit, R29, 00 extra per month was levied plus volume charges. Johannesburg charged R5, 81 per kl in the 20 to 40kl range, but without fixed charges as in Durban (Department of Finance 2003, 223).<sup>6</sup>

FBW only works for those able to restrict their use of water. It punishes those who have to use more but are not hedonistic users.

The evidence for spread of these down-sizing techniques is considerable. In Soweto 180 000 households are being put onto prepaid water (i.e., self-disconnections or downsizing). In Durban, compared to 1996 when only 8% of households were under 6 kl, by 2001, 18% fell into this low consumption group (DWAf, 2001b, 7). Neil Macleod, Durban's water manager explained how this works.

People who feel they are unable to pay us what they owe may agree to the installation of a device which will limit the water supply to 6 000 litres every 30 days. Then the amount owed will be frozen and no further interest will be charged on this amount. The device is removed only to allow a normal supply of water, if the amount outstanding is paid in full, plus R100 to cover the cost of removing the device. (Daily News, 1 March, 2001).

In Tafelsig, a dense urban suburb in Mitchells Plain, communal taps were installed to meet the constitutional basic (water) needs (*Cape Times*,

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<sup>6</sup> Within the 7 to 10 kl range the tariff is R4,15 in Tshwane.

27 September 2001) after mass boycotts of payments. In Queenstown, 'after disconnecting some residents up to three consecutive times, the municipality has had to resort to removing electric cables' (*Daily Dispatch*, 18 March 1999). In greater Pretoria, six months soon after FBW was started, almost 14 000 households got restricted water'. In the first half of 2003, an additional 32 000 were similarly restricted (McInnes, 2005, 113).

As a consumer in the small Free State town of Harrismith where heavy service-related riots broke out in late 2004, put it,

Water is a necessity. Really we try and save water and use as little as possible. But with seven people in the house, it's not easy to cope with what we get. We often run short. And this thing (the trickler) plays havoc with the sewerage. It takes long for the toilet to fill up. So if someone uses the toilet, you will have to wait for very long before it can be used again. What is the sense of having (infrastructure) this when you can't use it when you need it? (quoted in Smith and Fakir, 2003)

A councillor from the Harrismith area has criticised the 'tricklers' saying that they 'should only be used for those people who can afford to pay for water but who don't. What purpose does it serve when applied to poor people, apart from just giving them less water?' (ibid.). Harrismith has an 80% 'indigence rate' in its two townships; 75% of indigents do not pay when billed for services (Smith and Fakir, 2003).

This is relevant for understanding ways of putting people in place. An active lowering of living standards and consumption levels by municipalities re-inscribe racial aspects of inferiority associated with 'third world services' and black townships. This has important consequences for reinforcing powerlessness and knowing one's place. Market power has become the new boundary. The apparently 'voluntary' unequal development may well be a key feature of new ways to make the victim responsible for choosing lower services. Apparently progressive policies like FBW can be shaped to serve bureaucratic and state management imperatives at the same time as reducing the living standards of urban township residents and reducing the use-value of their household conveniences.

The rationales for FBW flows from the idea that transgressions (e.g. illegal connections/ unaccounted for water) and other costs associated with the reproduction of 'surplus' people (a term used to describe

Bantustan populations and informal shacks settlements in the 1980s) ought to diminish. With formal access the poor could be less of a financial burden to the local state. They ought to know their place in society. But this agenda, the state believes, only has some chance of succeeding if it is heavily promoted and 'customers' suitably re-educated. Threats of punishment have to be credible and education in the scarcity value of water vigorous. The Johannesburg Water Company's 'customer services' division for example shows precisely how such an agenda has been implemented. It has conducted an education campaign to show the poor that six kl is enough to survive in an urban setting. The company has led a crusade in schools and communities to teach families that they can survive on 6 000 litres per month. A family on six kl could choose five body washes; six toilet flushes, two kettles of water, one sinkful water for dishes (per day), and one clothes wash every second day ([www.johannesburgwater.co.za](http://www.johannesburgwater.co.za)).

#### **5. Prepays as a paradigm and cultural shift (knowing yourself, learning self control); a new civilizing mission**

Dubbed a 'paradigm shift' and 'the way of the future' by town planners leading local politicians and municipal experts (Imeisa, 2001, p. 31), the 'installation of prepaid meters (PPM) in South Africa has taken place with an amazing speed. Already by 2000, the national electricity commission (Eskom) and municipalities had installed some 3.2 million prepaid meters. 'Most went to new customers, i.e., previously non-electrified houses' in black areas (Tewari and Shah, 2002, pp. 25-6). As an Eskom manager explained, 'Eskom had a difficult time managing the conventional meters. Eskom used to hire workers whose main task was to read meters and disconnect electricity of those whose payments were overdue. This entailed ensuring the transportation from house to house and the protection of its employees in the event of conflict with customers.' The conventional metering, in the absence of proper social attitudes to electricity, became a system demanding very high maintenance. Prepaid metering reduced this cost tremendously.' (McGibbon, 2002).

Conlog, a single ANC-linked firm, boasted of its 'installed base of two million prepaid meters, ... undoubtedly *one of the largest in the world*' and its cosy relationships with over half South Africa's municipal

authorities. Significantly, President Mbeki attended the launch of Conlog, which in 2002, won a R100 million contract to supply 80% of all Eskom electricity prepaid meters 'into predominant low-cost and rural housing' ([www.conlog.co.za/PressRelease/pressr\\_2002\\_5.htm](http://www.conlog.co.za/PressRelease/pressr_2002_5.htm)). The State supported prepaid meters,

'The pre-paid meters are in fact designed and programmed to provide the basic amount for free. They have the added advantage of allowing households to monitor and control their water consumption... households appreciate this facility' (Kasrils, 2003).

Non-payment of telephone, electricity, water bills, it was hoped, could become a thing of the past with upfront prepayment.<sup>7</sup> The Cape Town Municipality believed 'the advantages (of prepaids) far outweighed the disadvantages, and it will enable people to manage their water consumption and finances' (*Cape Times*, 27 Sept 2001).

Widely promoted as the 'ultimate solution' to non-payment, the PPM, and FBW have become a major state techniques in local political 'management'. Since consumers 'self-disconnect' the PPM strategy is 'debt-proof' and convenient for councils as long as consumers do not tamper with the system. The State also argues that the PPM is a convenient way of giving households their free ration of water. The ppm represents an ideal way to teach people to self-regulate and to know their place.

Less dictatorial, and concealing the penalty itself as Foucault (1995, p. 10) would put it, the PPM does not have to be read by council workers, and no bills have to be sent out. Disconnections are self-imposed by users. Many consumers, however, do believe it at least provides them a measure of direct control over their expenditure and at the same time avoids billing errors, a common problem. The consumer bears the costs (time and transport) of having to buy prepaid units from the municipality or local vendors or shopping outlets. This downloading of transactions and costs to the end-user may also be counted as a part of the logic of 'private-ization'. Since consumers are personally and individually accountable; social problems become their private woes to a much larger extent than before. Atomized, the person who self-disconnects must take private

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<sup>7</sup> Sowetans over two years (2001/2) owed R 506 million to Eskom, and payment rates fell from 61% to 36% in the same period (*Sowetan*, 14 March 2003). Since the early 1990s, some 65 000 or 45% of township bondholders have had homes repossessed (*Financial Mail*, 30 August 2002, p. 34).

blame. Water prepaids can therefore be seen as the next frontier, after electricity and prepaid telephones, in firming up what is now called the 'culture of prepayment' that the state desperately wants to inculcate.

By 1998, there were several water prepaid schemes: Hermanus, Khutsong, Modderspruit, Koffiefontein and rural areas of Eastern and Northern Cape. However, after 2002 all RDP houses with in-house or yard taps were meant to be fitted with prepayment water. In 2003, large townships like Orange Farm and much older ones like Soweto were targeted for PPM. Johannesburg Water, the new corporatized utility that emerged out of restructuring in 2001, spoke optimistically of a 'new culture of prepayment' in South African which would make installing prepaid water more acceptable to the population. In parts of Orange Farm and Soweto prepaid meters were installed as a quid-pro-quo for arrear write-offs (*The Star*, 2 May 2003) or sanitation installation, while violent resistance to prepaids has flared up in 2004.

The technical literature on prepayment (see Simes, Lings and Tshivase 1994; DBSA 2001) shows a keen awareness of the political 'benefits' of prepaid water, in particular what managers call 'conflict avoidance' and cheap administration. The commonly assumed advantages are summarized by Tewari and Shah (2002, p. 20): up-front payment will improve municipal cash flow; PPM may be used to recover collateral debts. There is no need to access the customer's property, thus risk employees' lives.<sup>i</sup> By eliminating the danger of inaccurate meter reading, PPM limits the scope for such complaints. The customer learns to manage his/her budget, and it empowers him/her.

None the less, a recent national survey of municipalities revealed that municipal managers overstate the extent of community support for PPM and 'there is a tendency by water services providers to assume that technology will solve problems which are in fact social ones' (WRC, 2003, p. 14). But as we have argued, they are also part of a wider project of new subject formation and new social attitudes: an ideal middle-class thrifty consumer transposed onto the poor. Prepaid meters, to borrow from Foucault (1995, p. 23) are 'political tactics'. As technologies they educate, they create 'modern' rational patterns of behaviour suitable for marketized social life.

As Foucault insisted, modern forms of power such as evident in the FBW and prepaid meters are not prohibitions but 'go right down to the

depths of society' as 'fields of knowledge'. The liberal commodity discourse associated with household's use of prepaid meters is evident in the idea that the consumer 'takes ownership' of the service (Johannesburg Water, 2001) and that such ownership is 'liberating', empowering and reinforces the myth of 'consumer sovereignty'. By household's taking 'ownership' they are much more an 'out of sight, out of mind' problem for the municipality, compared to households on conventional credit meters. Since there are no public records of how many times households self-disconnect, municipalities are also spared the political embarrassment of loud disconnections. Prepaid meters, even if silent disconnectors of the poor, do render township services legible, simple and governable for municipal managers. Payment boycotts—made popular by the ANC and UDF in the 1980s—become impossible with ppm, thus changing the structure of opportunities for resistance. Prepaid meters, unlike unmetered connections mean controlled incorporation of the poor into the formal state service network. The initial free amount on the prepaid meter is crucial it incentivizes 'wise use'. It disciplines consumers through direct money power: those who can't budget force themselves off the grid until the following month, when their next free amount is available.

Pre-paid meters, some evidence shows, may also breakdown community solidarity with consumers stealing water from one another or re-selling water to neighbours who no longer are prepared to give away water (Deedat, 2002). The Palmer Development Group's research suggested that, 'in some areas (of Pretoria and its surrounds), where pre-payment meters have been installed, payment levels are high but water consumption is very low as residents utilize other available water sources such as groundwater' (2001). In some cases, users try to use dirty water, with health consequences.

But 'prepayment technology has reduced, not necessarily solved the problem of pilferage; revenue losses from pilferage are still high (*Business Day*, 23 March 2001). Angry Soweto residents have repeatedly ripped out electricity prepaid meters and dumped them at local council or Eskom offices (*The Star*, 14 March 2003, Laurence, 2002). Disadvantages experienced by consumers of pre-paid services include consumers' perception that the prepayment system is an instrument to control communities; inconvenience and high costs of transport to purchase prepaid units, especially in small towns and rural areas. Highly politicized

communities such as Soweto in Johannesburg also have perceived prepaid meters as racially discriminatory (*Business Day*, 16 March 2004 and 17 November 2004) while more middle-class consumers have asked for prepaid meters because of repeated wrong billing and mistaken cutoffs by the municipality (*Sunday Times*, Prepaid power for the suburbs, 4 July 2004).

## 6. Concluding remarks

“Neoliberalism” as practiced by the ANC is less an ideological, quasi-religious commitment by the ruling group, and far more complex and ambiguous because it has to be welded to governability (a major void in neoliberalism). The state cannot simply abandon masses of people (disconnected both physically from services and potentially politically disconnected too). Through a mix of market and paternalistic developmental strategies (like Free Basic Water) rather than a simplistic neoliberal repressive agenda, the ANC-led government has sought an integrative, workable hegemonic model. The ANC has had enough space to manoeuvre to introduce ‘tactical neoliberalism’. Neoliberal rationalities as Dean (1999: 151) argues “exist in complex interrelations with neo-conservative and populist reaction as well as debates on morality and community. Neoliberalism is found within a field of multiple rationalities of government”. The service delivery agenda, I have argued sets up new contours of demobilisation and remobilisation and new lines of division within poor and working class communities. Services ultimately “serve to govern” (this is Ferguson’s formulation) and dominate the working class (much like the work in a capitalist factory that keeps the worker alive but reproduces wage slavery). Supplying regular services to the poor produces “power effects” and conditionalities which need to be weighed in any critical assessment of service delivery. As I have stressed throughout this paper, the side effect of delivering services is to educate citizens into modern market-like attitudes. Services are not without political conditionalities. They are meant to change the soul; they are meant to teach people how calculate, be thrifty, budget and ultimate to internalise an atomistic, egoistic rationality of capitalist commodity culture. The coercive power of money takes over where the pass laws left off.

As Marx argued, "The separation of public works from the state and their migration to the domain of works undertaken by capital indicates the extent to which the real community has constituted itself in the form of capital" (1973, 531). He goes on to argue. "This shows the degree that capital has subjugated all conditions of social production to itself...and the extent to which social reproductive wealth has been capitalised, and all needs are satisfied through the exchange form.... Socially posited needs of the individual, i.e., those which he consumes and feels not as a single individual in society but communally with others --- whose mode of consumption is social by the nature of the thing --- are likewise consumed and also produced through exchange. The capitalist engaged in socially consumed products such as roads, water networks...compels payment by means of protective *tariffs*, monopoly and state coercion" (1973, 532). Finally, as Marx put it, "capital cannot rest until it has subordinated the entire social fabric to itself."

Instead of making money the community, it is the social movements that have instead posed a different idea of services, of community and of morality and social life. Since 2000, several dozen groups, fiercely critical of the ANC's neoliberal policies were able to gain mass support around the service delivery issues (Desai, 2002; Ngwane, 2005).<sup>8</sup> Many of these groups openly advocate direct action and civil disobedience (destroying bills, meters and reconnecting electricity illegally); these groups have won considerable sympathy given the widespread frustration with the ANC government over its mis-handling of a broad range of issues (HIV-aids, mass unemployment, services and high food prices) and failing to produce real local democracy. But beyond these groups, since 2004 new localised internal oppositions to the ANC's delivery and political failures have arisen in the form of militant concerned citizens groups. The significance of the working class and poor people's movements goes beyond services but attack the social void and social dissolution of neoliberalism (see

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<sup>8</sup> The Anti-Privatisation Forum, the Landless People's Movement; Durban Social Movement; The Northern People's Movement for Delivery; the Concerned Citizens Forum; the Ceasefire Campaign; the Katlehong Concerned Residents, Vaal Working Class Co-ordinating Committee; the Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign; Nelspruit Anti-Privatisation Coalition; Youth for work, and Tembisa Social Forum are among some of the better known groups.

Taylor-Gooby 2000; Harvey 2004) and market society so famously uttered by Thatcher: “there is no society, only individuals”.

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