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DOI: [https://dx.doi.org/
10.18820/24150509/
JCH41.v2.7](https://dx.doi.org/10.18820/24150509/JCH41.v2.7)

ISSN 0258-2422 (Print)
ISSN 2415-0509 (Online)

Journal for
Contemporary History
2016 41(2):120-143
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POLITICISING SERVICE DELIVERY IN SOUTH AFRICA: A REFLECTION ON THE HISTORY, REALITY AND FICTION OF BEKKERSDAL, 1949-2015¹

Abstract

The history of the Bekkersdal Township on the Far West Rand, located in the Westonaria Municipal region, as it is known since 2015, dates back to the post-World War II years when the township was formally established in 1949. After 65 years of existence, and inclusive of an extended informal surrounding township, the still expanding informal settlements currently challenge local infrastructural initiatives to their limits. News reports of dissatisfaction about service delivery and a politicising of perceived frustrations regarding service delivery – like those at Bekkersdal – appear to ignore the history of the region all too easily. As a consequence, it allows for expressing reality only halfway, which may sometimes cause it to be transformed into fiction of which a nagging narrative repeats itself continually, yet with no progress or turn in sight. By means of archival research, open interviews and a thorough reflection on newspaper reports, the authors aim to reflect on the history of Bekkersdal against the background of this statement. Aspects of the service delivery history of Bekkersdal will be highlighted and related to the political focus, politics and a politicising of the day. Bekkersdal's history will also be touched upon against the backdrop of the gold mining developments in the region in the heyday of apartheid. It will also be pointed out that, even in 2015, the region is still very much in a colonial mode as far as land occupation and limitations in local government empowerment within a central government authority are concerned.

Keywords: Bekkersdal (Westonaria); Far West Rand; politics; gold mining; service delivery; protest; community research; local history; integrative multidisciplinary research; ecohealth and wellbeing.

Sleutelwoorde: Bekkersdal (Westonaria); Verre Wesrand; politiek; goudmynbedryf; dienslewering; protesaksie; gemeenskapsnavorsing; plaaslike geskiedenis; geïntegreerde multidissiplinêre navorsing; ekogesondheid en welsyn.

1 This study forms part of a National Research Foundation (NRF) project on Community Engagement Research in an Ecohealth and Wellbeing Study regarding Mining Communities in which multiple disciplines from especially the humanities participate. The opinions expressed in the article are that of the authors and not of the NRF.

1. INTRODUCTION

In 1886, and up to the start of the South African War in 1899, the Central Witwatersrand was the main gold-producing region in the country. The East and West Rand were developed from the early years of the 20th century. Ever since the 1930s, large-scale gold prospecting commenced in the so-called West Wits Line in the Far West Rand. Five mines were established as an investment with a value calculated to be, “well over £50 million”.² On 5 June 1934, the first gold mine in dolomite deposit area was established by the Venterspost Gold Mining Company. The Venterspost Mine came into production in October 1939, followed by Libanon in March 1949 (Union of South Africa 1958:137-138). On the farms Venterspost, Gembokfontein, Libanon and Uitval, the mineral rights belonged to the New Consolidated Gold Fields Company. They established the company Western Areas Limited (Galloway 1995:5-6, 8). Before 1942, the mining authority Western Areas Limited took some financial and managerial strain in order to ensure that the barren areas in which they operated functioned reasonably, especially with regard to ensuring sufficient accommodation for employees. In that year, a health committee under chairmanship of the mine director at Western Areas Limited, Paul Nel, was approved by provincial authorities. Under Nel’s passionate leadership and guidance in the several committees in which he served, the infrastructural development in the area developed with tremendous strides (impressions based on Galloway 1995:8; *Randfontein Herald* 2005:1).

Amongst others, a township for black inhabitants of the recently established Westonaria and Venterspost mining townships were acknowledged on land made available by Western Areas Limited and by Randfontein Estates Gold Mine. By late 1948, when Westonaria was awarded full council status, this council gradually took over the work of the health committee in the “Native [sic] Settlement”. Provincial authorities provided 110 morgen of land (approximately 94,17 ha) at a cost of £1 300 to set aside 100 morgen for homes and to build 850 houses, as well as to ensure that the remainder of the land was used for establishing a cemetery.

The native settlement (more clearly defined as “Bekkersdal” after only 12 years of its existence) functioned by virtue of Act 25 of 1945 (Municipal Report 1956). This act very much formed part of the colonial mentality of the time (Myers 2008:1-15), namely that of “allowing” limited to controlled land occupation according to the Group Areas Act close to industrial development in the so-called

2 The mines in the current Carletonville area are not discussed. Some were in the past known by the names, Blyvooruitzicht (1942), West-Driefontein (1952) and Doornfontein (1953). See also, Elize S van Eeden “The history of Gatsrand, from the settling of the Trekker community, circa 1839, until the proclamation of Carletonville in 1948” as on Boloka, <<http://hdl.handle.net/10394/10805>>. The original Afrikaans version of this MA-dissertation (1988) is also available at the North-West University (NWU).

“white” demarcated areas (Union of South Africa 1956:99). Because of this arrangement, proper local governance was also distorted, being subordinate to central government (compare Olowu and Wunsch 2004:32; Walker 2006:67-92). Different governing and legal systems also applied to different groups of people (Bekink 2006:745; De Visser 2005). Some municipalities took practical steps to lay out townships (as happened in the Krugersdorp area – the present-day Merafong), while others embarked on builder-owner schemes. Municipalities at the time lacked experience, and no organisation existed to which they could turn for advice (Compare Olowu and Wunsch 2004:32-34). Ever since the outbreak of the Second World War (1939-1945), housing insufficiency for black people deteriorated to such an extent as to create unsolvable issues by the late 1950s. To provide for the lack of housing, several squatter camps developed in an uncontrolled way on illegally occupied vacant land near towns or places of work (Bonner 1991:62-68). With no other accommodation available, it was hardly possible to refuse squatters and squatting. Equally so, sufficient running water and basic minimum sanitation facilities (if any) became a menace to squatters, local government and inhabitants of surrounding towns (Union of South Africa 1956:102).

Contrary to other squatter settlements in the erstwhile Witwatersrand, the “Native Settlement” for which the Westonaria Council was responsible, did not, by the early 1960s, display a spirit of, “independence and insubordination” (Van Eeden 2014:25) that could perhaps have culminated in violence against authorities, as was experienced in other parts of the Witwatersrand (Bonner 1991:70-72). As time passed, a discontent and a frustration regarding living and working conditions, spirited by waves of a growing national consciousness against suppressive and destructive human rights practices, were main issues continuously exploited by politicians and politicised by groups in local areas, such as Bekkersdal, as the shoe fitted (Van Eeden 2014:28-30).

The then expanding Bekkersdal, from its humble spatial founding in 1945 and its official proclamation in 1949 (Van Eeden 2014:26), in the thriving, internationally known West Wits Line gold mining area (Union of South Africa 1958:137-138) inevitably became a long-drawn-out marathon of “issues”. Especially long was the issue of slow, unstable and unsatisfactory formal township progress, pressured by the housing needs of a fast growing informal settlement. In this scenario, the Bekkersdal community – solemnly occupied with establishing a personal livelihood, while still respecting government and mining authorities in the heyday of National Party Apartheid – continued to operate within a strong affection for colonial indirect rule (compare Rossouw 2008:1-8). Gradually, Bekkersdal residents expressed an increasing dissatisfaction. Improper guardianship over time, a population increase far above the existing formal boundaries and the gradual downscaling of mining operations after decades of careless activity, created a platform for political instability with traces of anarchical

resistance. These were directed at local governance. Sporadic violent activities negated any notions of sustainable development (Van Eeden 2014:26).

Since the 1970s, outburst of dissatisfaction with service delivery³ were reported in the media, followed by more politically motivated violence since the 1990s; while muted discontent at the time is similarly traceable in archival accounts (compare NA CDB, 1985). The eventual uniqueness of this, still continuing, Bekkersdal saga of unhappiness is that by December 2013, it caused Bekkersdal to be labelled as one of the most unstable, violent and controversial township areas in South Africa (Poplak 2014:1).

The formal and informal sides of Bekkersdal, Westonaria Municipal area in 2015



Source: Google Earth-Images © 2015 Digital Globe (Multimedia adaption: WJ Meiring 2015).

3 Service delivery, in the context of this discussion, is understood as principles and policies used to guide the design, development and operation of services delivered by a service provider, such as the municipality, to a specific user in a specific context, such as Bekkersdal. If deliberating service delivery as concept in more depth, it is never defined as a one-way participation approach. Citizen involvement and contributions are reviewed as essential. See JL Brudney and RE England, "Toward a definition of the coproduction concept", *Public Administration Review*, Jan-Feb. 1983, pp. 59-65.

2. THE HISTORY

2.1 In search of a stable gold mining environment within an unhealthy political system, 1949-2013

An expanding gold mining industry triggered several secondary economic sector needs. A workforce was required – one for which permanent infrastructural accommodation could be made available. Yet, in the early days, the view expressed by central and local government authorities was that most black mining employees actually had other permanent accommodation and/or temporary structures to live in elsewhere (NA 1941; Union of South Africa 1958:102-103; *West Rand Times and Westrander* 1959). As the years since 1949 passed, availability of accommodation in formal Bekkersdal could consequently not cater fast enough for the rapid population growth and for adequate service requirements. The local municipality appears to have, within its limited financial capacity, addressed urgent sanitation needs in the informal areas of Bekkersdal, even though these were actually outside their authority, management and responsibility (compare NA 1955; Union of South Africa 1958:105).

From time to time, central government announced infrastructural upgrade initiatives on suitable land, while also accentuating concerns with regard to environmental instability – a reality that, right from the start of mining operations, inhibited possibilities of approved development (NA CDB 1985). However, after 35 years the informal outskirts of an initially reasonably stable, formal Bekkersdal gradually bloomed politically (Van Eeden 2014:26), amidst a trend of nationwide African nationalism (compare Giliomee 2014:411-413). Expressing local discontent through community associations or organisations (like NGO's and vigilance, as well as ward committees), and later through political parties, became a habitual practice. In most cases before 1994 these political associations seldom had a meaningful impact to ensure proactive change locally, as their connections with local government, and the exercising of modernisation were limited. The next section will review how politically related violence developed in Bekkersdal historically, as well as how it was managed.

2.2 Political violence instigated prior to the April 1994 democratic elections due to inadequate services

Judging by the views of political analysts, it appears as if, ever since it's early days, Bekkersdal had been an Azanian People's Organization (AZAPO) stronghold, more than that of any other political organisation due to its members' active involvement in local affairs (Aboobaker 2013:8; *The Citizen* 1993). The founding of an African National Congress (ANC) branch in Bekkersdal in September 1990 further underscored the possibility of inter-organisational clashes between AZAPO and ANC members, especially among youth groups (Makobane 1992:12; Makaringe

1990:12). In the late eighties, the “sleepy” Bekkersdal awakened politically with strides, compared to other parts of Gauteng and the rest of the country where political bloodshed, as a sign of bitter discontent against the government’s racially directed apartheid policy, became the order of the day (NA CDB 1988; Sekola 1990:11). Consequently, the 1990 political violence in Bekkersdal was soon transformed into local vandalism, disruption of education, and severe brutality (Memela 1990:4; Anon 1990:11). In many ways, the above-mentioned acts were similar to subsequent and more recent incidences (Simelane and Nicolson 2014) all over South Africa in which the youth were involved (compare Joubert 2014:525-526; Kekana 2015:25-28). Educational institutions in Bekkersdal regularly experienced setbacks (e.g. vandalism and indefinite school closures), because of a fear of youth violence (compare Moodley 1990:7; WLM 2012-2013). A relatedness to the extraordinary violent activities, as a response to service delivery issues in the politically violent early 1990s, was occasionally articulated, “This is not just haphazard violence, but an expression of the oppressed people deprived of the most ordinary human rights” (Makobane 1991:8).

Amidst all the ferocities and allegations, central government had no option but to declare Bekkersdal (together with Kagiso, Munsieville and Swanieville near Krugersdorp) an area of unrest (Anon 1992:2). In seeking for the main reasons why uncontrolled violence erupted in Bekkersdal (*Sowetan* 1993:2-3), IFP organiser for the erstwhile Transvaal, Themba Khoza, alleged, “the primary enemy was apartheid, which was present in Bekkersdal in the form of violence, political intolerance and poverty (Anon 1993:4; Molefe 2004:20).

Apartheid as government system, originating indirectly from the British governing system of colonial indirect rule, has, since its initial application, been mainly attributed to the status of white colonial inhabitants (inclusive of the so-called Afrikaner paradigm). It would become and remain the future culprit for all that would go wrong (compare Giliomee 2014:434-447) and, in many instances, rightly so. Over and above the apartheid system being labelled as evil (Gibson 2004:132, 136, 139-140; Kgosimore 2001:97), the last six months of 1993 turned sour in Bekkersdal with regard to the unsafe dolomite issue in some of the informal settlement areas. Days before Christmas 1993, people were prevented from starting with the establishment of yet another informal squatter camp, one to have been called X-Town (see map, and also Mavuso 1993:2). Tension amongst groups lasted until, and even after, the first democratic elections in South Africa in April 1994 (Moleedi 1994:4; Maluleke 1994:16). From time to time, the rendering of inadequate services was associated with outbreaks of violence, coupled with dissatisfaction with rent that was regarded as outrageously high for housing. Rent was charged by the Bekkersdal township authority, in addition to that charged by residents acting as landlords (Anon 1991:5). “Since we [Mqina and co-founders] founded this camp [1990] we have been attacked by elements from the community who lost shack dwellers and boarders who provided them

[the community] with a nice income [...] the camp was established after Azapo failed to secure land to accommodate thousands of people living in township houses" (Anon 1991:5).

AZAPO and others were not able to "secure land" within a governing system formally favouring apartheid between races. In 1990, the Bekkersdal Environmental Awareness Campaign (BEAC) group, in a township which was perceived as an AZAPO and PAC stronghold (Garson 1991:7), blamed incidents of violence on a lack of housing, poor health services and unemployment (Maseko 1990:1). Joe Seremane (BEAC member and former Robben Island expatriate) later added his observations on the state of affairs by including the migrant worker presence issue. "[T]he conflict [...] [is] a complex situation fuelled by crime against the older migrant labourers who are shack dwellers [...] 'homeboys' living in the area [are] attacked by opponents or robbed by criminals which [...] [it] happens often on weekends when people get drunk, they recruit their friends on the surrounding mines to wage war on the culprits [...] While the conflict may have started as a political struggle for control of Bekkersdal, it has become little more than an anarchic mess" (Garson 1991:7).

However, several efforts have been recorded that vouch for efforts from 1990 to 1992 to create stability in Bekkersdal (Anon 1992:2; Makobane 1992:12). These efforts occurred amidst violent incidences of destruction by former mine worker residents in the informal township, Mandela Park. Acts of violence also sparked hostility in several other informal areas close by.

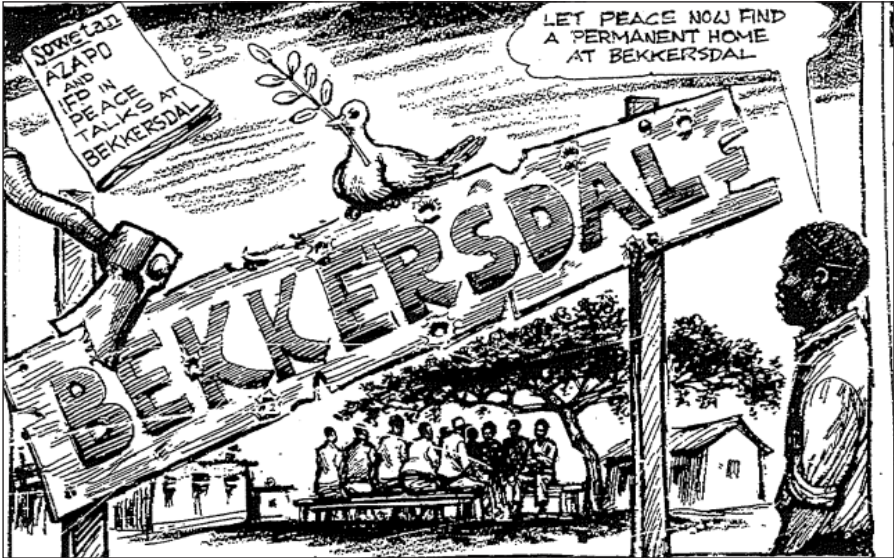
In October 1991, the Bekkersdal Interim Civic Association (BICA), with Mr Isaac Mathambo as chair, started to operate in order to establish a permanent civic association. Early initiatives, which had been on-going since 1984, were at long last being realised (Mbhele 1991:11) and widely supported (an estimate of a 95% support was mentioned). Since 15 December 1991, the formally established BICA was tasked to engage in negotiations with the city council for better and more affordable services in the township. However, a shortage of electricity received priority attention. At this time, there was looming discontent regarding high perceived rents; one that had been lingering for more than a year. Noticeably, it was youthful elements that took the lead in stirring up discontent in the Bekkersdal community. By July 1990, for example, it was reported that four youths of the Kgothlang High School marched to the Bekkersdal Town Council regarding the rent issue (Makobane 1992a:12). It was in early 1992 that BICA supported the rest of the community and started an indefinite sit-in at the Bekkersdal Town Council offices. Apparently, on several occasions the council was not eager to meet with disgruntled community members to discuss local grievances, such as house reparations (Makobane 1992b:2) and rent levels. The fact that councillors demanded informal shack dwellers to pay an additional R6 per family to the Council, was not received favourably. The last straw to members of the community was when a councillor fired shots to disperse residents. The

result was that the town clerk, FJ Knott, received a memorandum, calling for the resignation of the Bekkersdal councillors, as well as the resignation of Councillor Sanie Modimoeng as chairperson of the Kgothlang High School committee. The main reasons for the memorandum requests were said to be, [the] council's failure to develop the area, maladministration of funds and failure to give students bursaries (Makobane 1992:12).

Whether the memorandum served any purpose at all, or whether the requests were attended to, remains historically shrouded. An apparent failure to further succeed in establishing communication with the Bekkersdal councillors, as well as the limited impact the submission of the memorandum had on the Westonaria Local Authority in showing a sign of respect to the voice of the Bekkersdal residents, could all have contributed to the community's helpless frustration. The community's subsequent acts of frustration and powerlessness were simply transformed into actions involving the on-going destruction of houses – commodities that were already limited and largely unaffordable. Several houses were damaged during the violence that characterised the early nineties. At the time, approximately 90 Bekkersdal inhabitants reportedly did not even have a home to live in. Dissatisfaction snowballed as other, seemingly less important issues were added, resulting in an uneasy restlessness. For instance, bursaries promised to 82 would-be tertiary students were supposed to have been dealt with timely according to the Bekkersdal inhabitants. It was argued that by 11 February, the date the council intended to deal with it, it would be too late for the would-be students to apply for admission to tertiary educational institutions (Makobane 1992b:2). Improper and irregular communication intended for residents from local and central authorities appears to have upset the community maximally (Van Eeden 2014). Occasionally, local government would also express its frustrations at not having the disposal of funds, the required authority, the necessary land, or the ability to turn all community requests of, especially the informal residents, into positives. All of this continued, while local government was in turn answerable to and responsible for a community that was either unwilling to pay for, or possibly unable to afford the basic services provided to them. In this regard, the issue of a lack of proper land availability close to the formal section of Bekkersdal (owing to historical decision making and still nurtured in a post-colonial era) did not allow for development. Furthermore, there was the evidential reality of the dolomitic environment on, especially, the western side of formal Bekkersdal. The fact that this was unsuitable for development only served to complicate and worsen the situation. Mass removal to another safer area remained an option, but only a long-term option, and certainly not one supported by all the community members. Neither was it guaranteed that they would benefit adequately by such a move (Van Eeden 2014).

However, by not being successful immediately at negotiating with the councillors in 1992, BICA and its supporters momentarily put on ice their grievances

in early February 1992, and celebrated one year of “political” peace at Bekkersdal. “The anniversary [...] started on Thursday with ‘prayers for peace’ by the Manyamo Women’s Union, representing different church denominations. On Friday there was a clean-up campaign by pupils from all schools in the area. Saturday [was] dubbed ‘sports for peace’ [and] taken up by events such as tennis, volleyball, boxing, karate, athletics and soccer” (Makobane 1992b:2).



Source: *Sowetan* 1993, p. 6.

The newspaper has been informed that this cartoon will be used.

3. THE REALITY

3.1 Local services enmeshed in politics after the April 1994 democratic elections

The Local Government Transition Act of 1993 (LGTA) served as the first step towards the transformation of local governments (Bekink 2006), with the Local Government Negotiating Forum (LGNF) acting as the operational body from 1993 onwards. It had to ensure progress towards equal and acceptable services (Bekink 2006). Hoffman (ca. 2004-2005:1-34) adds that when the ANC came into power in South Africa in 1994, they promised an, “ambitious programme to expand access to public services, regardless of ability to pay, in order to redress the inequities the apartheid system [and previous systems] created” (Hoffman ca. 2004-2005). The ANC delegated to local governments significant powers and responsibilities

to implement a developmental local government policy by placing them in charge of the provision of access to vital services, such as electricity, primary health care, sanitation and water (also compare De Visser 2005:313; Atkinson 2007:53-77). Still, Hoffman (ca. 2004-2005:1-34) is assertive that government has, in the meantime, reversed its policy. He states that, "government, rather than encouraging local governments to provide affordable services for all, seems to embrace almost the opposite: local governments should treat access to services like private commodities by charging citizens market rates".

Though the new central government was apparently "remarkably successful", Hoffman expresses his concern that, "this policy may be undermining political accountability", because, "neither political competition nor the quality of the civil service influences access to local services". Hoffman (2004:1-34) continues, "Economically, central government delegated to local governments the responsibility to provide almost all public services, with the exception of education and housing. The government attempted to create strong political accountability, and hence the incentive for local governments to provide these services through direct elections for local councillors.⁴ To facilitate the new economic and political roles of local government, the ANC government implemented a wide range of administrative reforms at the local level as well. They created four levels of administration: national, provincial, district, and municipal".

Another contentious matter was the appointment of administrators for 19 black townships in the former Pretoria-Witwatersrand-Vereeniging (PWV) region (inclusive of Bekkersdal), which was said to be delayed by the Executive Board for Housing at the Provincial Administration (Van der Walt 1994:2). Three years after an all-inclusive democratic governing style was introduced in South Africa, Bekkersdal was still under strain of faction differences regarding ways of approaching ordinary community members, as well as who should be the distinguished group to do so. In 1997, for example, hostility between ANC members and the South African Civic Organisation (SANCO), both active in Bekkersdal, sparked tension. SANCO members were accused of not having been democratically elected in the area; therefore shack burning was part of the process of demonstrating discontent. SANCO representative, Archie Qokweni, responded to accusations as follows, "It is not surprising that the ANC does not know of our good work in this area. Sanco has created business opportunities by building a bakery, a self-help scheme and brick-manufacturing company [...] Our goods were stolen by forces that are against progress and the upliftment of the people at the lower end of our economy [...] the ANC Executive has been infiltrated by the National Party" (Pokwana 1997:6).

Despite SANCO's response, an approach of distancing themselves from SANCO activities was followed by local ANC-supporters and by the Community

4 Hoffman refers to the arrangement that voters in local elections in South Africa cast two ballots, namely one for a ward councillor and one for a party.

Police Forum, as SANCO members were regarded as the main instigators of tension (*Sowetan* 1998:4; *Worldonline* 2013). Local government in Westonaria, which serves Bekkersdal, thus remained known as a government served predominantly by an ANC council (Van Eeden 2014:26).

By the early 21st century, South Africa's 283 municipalities were divided by the government into three categories, namely A, B and C. Category A involved the six largest cities, namely Cape Town, Durban, East Rand, Johannesburg, Port Elizabeth and Pretoria. South Africa had 243 Category B municipalities that were inclusive of all other inhabited areas, with 35 Category C municipalities that were composed of small and scattered communities (Hoffman 2004). In many ways, local governments like Westonaria (a Category B municipality) exercised limited authoritative powers as outlined, and within, the ambit of the Constitution. Numerous active cost-recovery outsourced services existed with the Provincial Government of Housing, predominantly steering the upgrading of the poverty-stricken township of Bekkersdal (both formal and informal). Upgrades also included more than just housing relocation from dolomitic areas perceived to be dangerous. They were inclusive of sanitation maintenance, road construction and other desperately required services – inclusive of job creation (compare Schmidt 2004:3). Promises of implementation of the R1,2 billion Bekkersdal Urban Renewal Project (BURP) at the time, as initiated by central government, brought about some peace and calm regarding services. This simultaneously enhanced political stability (Van Eeden 2014:39).

According to Schmidt (2004), an estimated 48 000 registered voters of the Westonaria community (inclusive of Bekkersdal) voted extraordinarily enthusiastically, despite the disputes and dissatisfaction of the community members over the proposed province border demarcation process. There were speculations that Bekkersdal might be incorporated into the North-West Province after an announcement by the national government of the intention to redefine boundaries (*News 24* 2004). These speculations were rampant and not well received by the residents of Bekkersdal (Schmidt 2004). There was a general sentiment amongst residents that the country's richest province, Gauteng, should be their lifeline to a better future and not the North West Province with its own statistics reflecting poverty (Francis 2002:3-22). The residents' discontent was evident in the formation of the Anti-North-West Campaign. It was through this campaign that residents threatened to withhold their votes during the local elections of 2005 (Radebe 2004:3), should the decision over the province demarcation not be favourable. However, the Anti-North-West Campaign proved to be successful, as Bekkersdal remained demarcated as part of the Gauteng Province (Van Eeden 2014).

With 2013 approaching, the BURP was still ongoing, but it operated on a limited scale only, and was not yet projecting the visible outcome that residents had anticipated (WLM BURP 2013). As far as the developmental local government

approach was concerned, there were rumours and concerns regarding corruption, lack of skills and, most likely, several other incalculable complexities forming part of the perceived BURP “failures” (compare WLM BURP 2013; De Visser 2005:1-313). Thus, in recent years in Bekkersdal, the saga characterising the dissatisfaction and violence of the 1990s has merely continued (SABC News 2014). This was the case because difficulties, and perhaps perceived impossibilities with regard to changing the local historical legacy of Bekkersdal within a few months, or a decade, were not bought by the local communities. To the Bekkersdal community, past realities apparently are not a concern, as they only perceive problems that point to local government inadequacies. Surely, local governments should at the very least contemplate on the “why” issues of politicking, instead of service delivery, service delivery vandalism and continual dissatisfaction with the *status quo* (Van Eeden 2014; Atkinson 2007:53-77). When costly improvements, such as clinics, libraries and stadiums, are torched during violent protests, it must impact negatively on efforts to create a mode of sustainable development in the Bekkersdal community.

Local municipalities, in general, are said to continue to deliver poor performances in terms of services supposed to be rendered to communities and, in addition, an utter lack of quality and leadership. The 2011/12 audit report on municipalities revealed that only 17 of the 278 municipalities in South Africa received a clean audit (Auditor General South Africa 2013), indicating a positive change of only 5%. Furthermore, there seems to be a disjoint between local municipalities, district municipalities and provincial government within the local developmental government approach (compare De Visser 2005).

4. SOME FICTION AMIDST REALITY

4.1 The 2014 Bekkersdal national election analysis

By 2014, the wellbeing of the formal and informal sections of the community became a contentious issue. It was reported on in several daily reports, reflecting the broader township realities (compare Moretsi 2000:7; Poplak 2014). Whenever impressions relating to violence and the politicising of service delivery in Bekkersdal are communicated in the media, they interestingly depict mostly men, either busy agitating somewhere in some street, or gathered at a place where overindulgence in liquor could instigate the individual, or a group, to rob some business or person, attributing the crime to “discontent”. Poplak (2014) recorded such a moment weeks before the national elections in May 2014. “What doesn’t make headlines is the pervasive crime that rips through these communities, much of it with ad hoc political connections. Last Friday, the leader of the Calabash gang, by name of Paulos, was killed in the street in front of his house, beaten to death by members of the Rival Creatures gang. Watched by dozens, it’s the kind

of thing that passes for entertainment around here. But the lads at Joe's [tavern] insist that the gangs are in part populated by young members of Julius Malema's Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) who combine standard gangster activities – drugs, maiming, leaning against cars – with political campaigning [...] 'If people want to vote, let them go vote, but [they] must vote out the ruling party. We can see the ANC is arrogant and uses force to coerce us into voting for them,' said Thabang Wesi, leader of the Concerned Residents of Bekkersdal Committee".

Outbreaks of protests resulting from perceived non-service deliveries continue to escalate across South Africa, especially close to elections, despite visible improvements of service delivery since 1994. It has been claimed that more people have access to basic needs, such as electricity, water and sanitation (Statistics South Africa 2013). In 2014, *Municipal IQ*, a municipal data and intelligence unit, documented more than 500 protests in the Gauteng Province alone. About 100 of these protests had turned violent. Although protests are common in South Africa, there appears to be a common trend that most protest activities manifest immediately before and during elections. This phenomenon can be explained in two ways: firstly, service delivery protests are not always related to poor service delivery only, but are often highly politicised and distorted by an elite few to achieve a desired political outcome; secondly, community members are aware of the fact that government may respond quickly and swiftly if protests occur just before an election (Alexander 2010). This situation can cultivate a platform for potential campaigning, or for dis-campaigning by exposing the incompetence and failures of the current government. This form of political mobilisation can, therefore, be used as a canvassing strategy for political parties to intervene under the watchful eyes of the media spectacle that always precedes an election. As an example of this, consider the 2014 established political party, the EFF, led by former ANC Youth League (ANCYL) President, Julius Malema, which also capitalised on the situation in Bekkersdal by intervening on behalf of the disgruntled communities involved in local protest actions (Poplak 2014). The EFF also intervened in towns such as Marikana (another mining town) in the North West Province, and on Orange Farm in the Gauteng Province. The EFF, as a political party, demonstrated their support for the bereaved mining community at Marikana and, in turn, they managed to garner votes in the national and provincial elections. Economist, K Heese (2014), points out a correlation between voter results and protest activities, "[P]rovincial results gains by the Democratic Alliance (DA) and the [...] EFF in Gauteng and by the EFF in the North West and Mpumalanga were arguably foretold by protest activity in these provinces, but the African National Congress's (ANC's) victory in the Eastern Cape and Limpopo and DA gains in the Northern Cape do not correlate with proportional protest activity over the past 10 years, 16 months or even 12 months. In statistical terms, there are correlations between proportional changes in the ANC's provincial support and provincial protest representation

over the past decade and this year — in other words, ANC losses are somewhat mirrored in protest activity”.

Individual political propaganda can thus easily be disguised under service delivery protests (Pillay 2014). Even as far back as the early nineties, political elites already utilised the insufficiency of service delivery in informal Bekkersdal to mobilise politically (Van Eeden 2014). Simelane and Nicolson’s (2014) recent detailed report on efforts by political parties to benefit from another party’s loss is self-explanatory. “On 13 March, a delegation of ANC Gauteng MECs, Ntombi Mekgwe, Eric Xayiya, Brian Hlongwa and West Rand District Municipality Mayor, Mpho Nawa, tried to visit Bekkersdal, which has recently been in the news because of violent service delivery protests, as well as Gauteng Premier Nomvula Mokonyane’s comment to residents that the ANC doesn’t want their ‘dirty votes’. Residents reportedly learned about the impending visit on social media and met the delegation by pelting stones and burning tyres. According to multiple news reports, the politicians’ bodyguards used live ammunition to scare off the protesting crowd”.

Apart from the male voices, as mentioned earlier, the one-sided and sometimes fictional reporting on political parties also created skewed views with regard to the political support Bekkersdal inhabitants in general express, and to what extent they really are dissatisfied with local service deliveries by the Westonaria District Municipality. The recent election reporting typically fits this category of one-sided, perhaps gender-dominated, skewed journalism, especially on the “huge following” of the EFF in Bekkersdal. “Mahlamulo Khumalo, a proud 20-year-old EFF member, said since the community hall had been burnt down and the gymnasium next to it destroyed, there had been no attempts by officials to guard what remained of the building from further vandalism. Khumalo added that the EFF had a ‘huge’ following in Bekkersdal and that the conduct of ANC officials in response to the turmoil did not help [...] Wiseman Gcwalangoeuthi, a United Democratic Movement organiser who was leading a small march through Bekkersdal on Sunday encouraging voters, said his party doesn’t have the same problems as the ANC in the area. ‘The ANC have been ruling here for 20 years and it hasn’t changed,’ he said, referring to issues of rubbish on the streets and sanitation problems [...] Commenting on evidence that those guarding ANC leaders on Thursday fired live ammunition, the DA’s Mmusi Maimane referred to recent deaths at protests and said, ‘As protests break out daily in Gauteng, it seems we are now living under the rule of bullets [...] Premier Mokonyane must act without delay to establish an inquiry that will lead to the facts around yesterday’s use of live ammunition in Bekkersdal”.

The outcome of the 2014 election in Gauteng Province proved otherwise, and its deeper meaning is followed up in research currently in progress.

The 2014 national elections (IEC 2014) recorded a total number of 34 983 voters in Westonaria. The ANC governing party managed to attain a

74,6% of votes in 2009 and in 2014 experienced a steep decrease to 68,4%. This comes after Bekkersdal experienced intense violence and disturbances since about August 2013 to May 2014 (*Mail and Guardian* 2013; Poplak 2014) – attributed by the community to poor service delivery, lack of action, poor leadership by government, corrupt officials and demeaning comments by the premier. These may have been some of the causal factors for the decline in ANC votes in Gauteng.

In essence, the marathon-like Bekkersdal woes on service delivery frustrations prevailed, while a notion was recorded that people too easily take services for granted, but are not acting responsibly themselves (Simelane and Nicolson 2014). “The official government line is that the [Bekkersdal] protest is about a development programme focusing on housing, but according to the Bekkersdal mineworkers, grievances run much deeper. Not enough areas are electrified, toilets get full and aren’t emptied and garbage and sewerage are common features in the street [...] Many of the residents seem either unemployed or in mining-related jobs and both situations also come with their own grievances. Sibongile Mtshazi, also employed in the mines, has a different attitude. He argued that the community is too dependent on hand-outs without focusing on trying to improve their own circumstances. People, he said, needed to work hard, be responsible and realise that managing finances is difficult.”

Yet, at the same time, Mtshazi complained about his poor living conditions, the lack of sanitation and decent housing (Simelane and Nicolson 2014). So the saga continues and repeats itself, with still no clear-cut understanding, or perhaps even a limited understanding, that the Bekkersdal history within a broader national consideration, inclusive of its destructed and destructive environment, remains part and parcel of the “problems” attributed to insufficiencies. These are cheaply and fictionally related in, especially, newspapers to a lack of local service delivery. Though some community members may also have a similar impression about local service delivery, the root of the problem for the occasional outbursts in Bekkersdal, in essence, can be attributed to a colonial mentality history of governing and land occupation (Van Eeden 2014). In a recent integrative multidisciplinary qualitative research study by a Bekkersdal research team (conducted in 2013), only 16 reports from a group of 498 participants in informal Bekkersdal (n=498) indicated that a lack of service delivery in particular affected their family happiness levels (Khumalo 2014; Koen and Van Eeden 2015). The perception, therefore, that poor service delivery lies at the heart of this community’s inherent struggle to cope and survive daily must be seriously contested as being related to fiction. Perhaps service delivery has become a convenient scapegoat for hiding behind when poor long-term planning in order to maturely and inclusively address regional and local legacies proactively has been a disastrous failure to date.

5. CONCLUSION

Historically, the establishment of Bekkersdal (very much Afrikaans in name and known as Bekkersdal since the 1960s) occurred during South Africa's first years of racial apartheid, which allowed for limited to temporary land occupation close to mining industries or on mine property itself. Though local governments and mining authorities, in the early days of mining operations (1940s-1950s) in the Far West Rand, were involved in providing financial and administrative assistance to newly established townships for black people (and also "officially", with government's consent, allowed for structured squatting, due to housing shortages), the local governments have never been in a financial position to abundantly support the development of the infrastructure of townships.

In this article, the aims were to highlight aspects of the service delivery history of Bekkersdal and to relate it to the political focus, politics and a politicising of the day (as a reflection of the reality). In the history of Bekkersdal, as outlined in the discussion, it was pointed out that the region is still very much in a colonial mode as far as land occupation and the limitations perceived in local government empowerment within central government authority is concerned. These historical realities appear to be ignored when issues regarding insufficient service delivery are on the public media table. Similarly, efforts by local government (both noteworthy and those worthy of criticism) within the central government of the day are portrayed.

From the study, the following four impressions have been gained. Firstly, it is a generally distorted (fictional) view that the broader Bekkersdal community participated in particular in so-called service delivery related violence prior to 1994; secondly, the reality that minor political groups/factions representing political parties allowed for the instigation of uprisings in Bekkersdal; thirdly, that journalists' reporting sometimes (or even most of the time) lingers on the minority view with regard to local affairs, ignoring a broader and more representative view of concerns and thus cultivating a fictional view; fourthly, local government, as representative of certain time frames before and after 1994, has been locked in a political paradigm with a certain level of power and an outlined, restricted ceiling as far as financial support is concerned. The financial ceiling understandably determines what local government can actually afford with a view to local infrastructure to the approximately 25% formal and 75% informal community members in Bekkersdal (in the WLM) at any given time.

Extraordinary contributions have been recorded in the history of the Westonaria Local Municipality. Even so, more professionalism (like communication, integrity and ethical decision-making) could perhaps have rectified several distorted views and misunderstandings on what was actually happening on local level. Because of government policy at the time of controversial land ownership history after the 1950s and arrangements after the Group Areas Act in 1964, the focus of

development mostly favoured the surrounding gold mines and the white minority in this particular area. As a consequence, its colonial and apartheid past, together with strenuous environmental circumstances, sanctioned the limited thoughts and possibilities of financial investment especially to “upgrade” the informal settlement areas of Bekkersdal where, for over three decades, service delivery dissatisfaction had mostly occurred. At the time of writing, it still was not possible for governing bodies to resolve this contentious issue in a fortnight’s time, except for gradually moving people to other and environmentally safer areas (Van Eeden 2014; WLM 2015:49).

A politicising of service delivery by political party specific partisans in the formal and particularly in the informal settlements of Bekkersdal can also be partially regarded as a replica of a number of other troubled mining and non-mining towns that are still prone to unrest due to poorly perceived service delivery (compare Von Holdt *et al.* 2011:2, 8, 12). Stages of progress in local development vary from one region to another and depend very much on whether very specific past and present destruction in every area of unrest, like that at Bekkersdal, is avoidable and surmountable. In the case of this community (formal and informal) its post-colonial gold mine created environmental destructions, coupled with a narrow-minded land settlement history, seem to be extraordinary difficulties to overcome. Ironically, these difficulties as reality are not part of any serious debate among national, provincial and local governing bodies. Community also seems to be equally ignorant or unaware thereof.⁵ So, to provide plausible explanations why Bekkersdal, and perhaps other parts of South Africa are under “smoke” (to use the word of Von Holdt *et al.* 2011) should thus be considered much more in research in relation to an area and region’s past, inclusive of its diversity of peoples. To further understand why Bekkersdal residents by 2015 still continued to vote for the ruling ANC government, despite the perceived lack or inadequate WLM-provision of basic services, lies at heart as to what has been discussed earlier, namely the discrepancy between reality and fiction in reporting. Yet, a more focussed research approach to determine people’s political connections or patronage, voting habits and emotions in, particularly, Bekkersdal may provide insight from a totally different angle than one is able to locate from local government and journalistic reporting.⁶

5 In the recent NRF-research by the NWU the 22 fieldworkers from Bekkersdal had to report their observations while interviewing the informal community side of Bekkersdal. Several fieldworkers (on 11 December 2013) reported that the residents regard the environment as satisfactory. Another reported that some community members said, “there is nowhere to go [...] see no other options, just to live there till the government provide them with RDP houses”.

6 As examples, compare P Alexander, “Rebellion of the poor: South Africa’s service delivery protests – a preliminary analysis”, *Review of African Political Economy* 37(123), March 2010, pp. 25-40; Z Hasnain, “The politics of service delivery in Pakistan: Political parties

Other complexities more visible and further instigating community outbursts that should not be ignored though are, amongst others, the WLM's perceived lack of accountability and ethical manner of conducting business in local government. As in any municipality these perceptions indeed requires urgent attention in the WLM. The WLM in 2014, as in previous years (WLM 2011/12:Ch 6), came under scrutiny of not receiving a clean audit. So, in 2014 a request was made that the WLM should be audited again (SAPA 2014:1). By late 2015, no report was yet published and reported as an oversight to be paid attention to in 2016 (WLM 2014/15: 239; Auditor General 2016). It further seems to remain a challenge – yet is essential – to establish proper and improved task correlation between local, district and provincial governance. What the future of Bekkersdal will bring under a new amalgamated administration between the WLM and the Randfontein Local Municipality after the 2016 local government elections (as perhaps a step in the right direction towards an improved task correlation) will be a future to be closely monitored.

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