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MIGRATIONS

NEVA MAKGETLA: SA must cater for new settlement patterns around cities

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Johannesburg and Tshwane doubled in size from 1996 to 2017, and western Mpumalanga and Cape Town grew over 50%, says the writer. Picture: ISTOCK

The effort to censor Inxeba, rhetoric about land expropriation and Johannesburg's campaign against inner-city residents all have something in common. They fail to internalise the extraordinary internal resettlement reshaping SA's economy, culture and politics.

The former so-called homeland areas have seen mass out-migration, largely to Gauteng, Cape Town and mining towns in the northwest of SA. Out-migration mostly leads to slower growth in population, not actual decline. It is transforming where and how South Africans live.

In the 1980s, estimates were that half the population lived in so-called "homelands". These were far from economic centres and impoverished, but before 1994, pass laws and removals made it hard for many to leave. That changed with the advent of democracy and by 2017 the share of the population living in these areas had fallen to a third.

Broader out-migration from the Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, the Northern Cape and Free State complemented that from the former homelands. In 1996 these provinces accounted for almost 40% of the population; by 2017 this was 33%. Populations of the former Transkei and Ciskei declined. The flip side is eye-popping growth in the Gauteng metros, the former East Rand and Cape Town. Johannesburg and Tshwane doubled in size from 1996 to 2017, and western Mpumalanga and Cape Town grew over 50%. In the 2000s, Gauteng overtook KwaZulu-Natal as SA's largest province.

Small mining towns in the North West, Northern Cape and Limpopo were the other main growth areas, and they have far less in the way of resources to provide for their new residents. Rustenburg's population climbed 75% from 1996 to 2011. Comparisons to peer economies underscore the extent of resettlement. In 1994, the largest cities in upper middle-income economies excluding China held 13% of the population; by 2016 the figure was 15%. In SA, the World Bank found the share of the population in the urban agglomeration around Gauteng climbed from 11% to 17%.

The erosion of apartheid geography supports redistribution and sustainable growth. Today millions more benefit from investments in production and infrastructure in SA's economic centres. The median household income in the former homeland areas was under R2,500 a month in 2016; in Johannesburg it exceeded R6,000. And richer cities spend more on residents. In 2017, Johannesburg's annual budget provided R11,000 a person; Amathole in the Eastern Cape just R5,000.

Migration to SA's economic centres cannot be stopped. Rather than ignoring resettlement, social and economic programmes have to provide for it more consistently. The main challenge is to get housing and social services to new residents, especially in smaller mining towns. Informal settlements often lack not only basic infrastructure, but also schools, transport, recreation and retail centres.

Resettlement highlights, too, the meaning of national citizenship rather than ethnic and regional fragmentation. Around Marikana miners from other regions are still often treated as temporary migrants, as in the past, rather than permanent citizens with rights to government services. That attitude is mirrored when Cape Town and Johannesburg try to displace poor people from the city centres.

The normalisation of SA's geography is disruptive, but it is central to economic growth, equality and cultural dynamism. And it follows ineluctably from democracy. The challenge is to provide for rapid growth in some cities and to accept the realities of national citizenship and cultural diversity, rather than hoping they will disappear if we ignore them.

- Makgetla is a senior researcher with Trade & Industrial Policy Strategies.

The advertisement is a horizontal banner. On the left, there is a photograph of a modern kitchen with a white countertop and blue cabinets. In the center, there is a red circular badge that says "ONLY R39.90". To the right of the badge is the cover of the "HOME OWNER" magazine, which features a "CONTACT WINNER" badge. Further right, the text "APRIL 2018 ISSUE ON SALE NOW" is displayed in large, bold, black letters. On the right side of the banner, there is a white pop-up survey box with a red border. The box contains the text "Please share your feedback" in bold black letters, followed by "Business LIVE" in a large, bold, black font. Below this, it says "We are conducting a quick survey to better understand our audience. Click here for the Privacy Policy" with a blue link. At the bottom of the box are two buttons: a green "Continue" button and a red "Cancel" button. The background of the pop-up box is a blurred image of a kitchen.