

What lies behind Trevor's 'beloved' game of golf?

Golf is a fun game of skill. Well, fun for some. **Jacklyn Cock** looks critically at the rapid growth of golf estates and sees in them mainly a destructive way of excluding most of the population from important resources and rights.

Golf is not a harmless game. It involves class power and it is tied into capitalism and its excesses of wealth and social display. This is why it was banned in communist China and why Castro shut down Cuba's golf courses after seizing power in 1959.

The 500 golf courses in South Africa involve the exclusion of the majority of South Africans from key resources such as arable land. They are also environmentally damaging as they use large amounts of chemical pesticides and fertilizers for maintenance, and destroy wetlands and indigenous vegetation during construction and mostly they use large amounts of water.

The growing number of golf estates illustrate dramatically the dynamics of *exclusion*. There are now some 81 golf estates which are fortified enclaves of wealth and privilege.

EXCLUSION FROM ARABLE LAND

Recently the Minister for Agriculture and Land Affairs raised concerns about the use of prime agricultural land for golf estates (areas with a golf course and residential stands). Her concern was that golf estates convert land to non-productive use while depopulating the areas and reducing employment.

A spokesperson from AgriSA, the



commercial farming association, agreed that golf estates involved the conversion of good agricultural land and the intensive use of water. This is especially worrying in the light of the declining production of major staples of the poor such as maize and wheat.

The size of an average 18 hole course is between 50 and 60 hectares according to a Western Cape Department of Environmental Affairs and Development Planning (DEADP) report. This indicates that at least 25 000 hectares in South Africa are involved.

Furthermore, there are about 81 golf estates in South Africa where the golf course is part of a residential estate and these are much larger than 50 to 60 hectares.

They range from Zimbali which covers 700 hectares to St Francis at 400 hectares. Using the last figure the total amount of land devoted to golf is thus in the region of 57 400 hectares.

The exclusion that golf estates involve is illustrated by the case of Bushman Sands golf estate. It was established in 2003 in the desperately poor village of Alicedale where most of the 4 500 residents survive on social grants. Locals are bitter that this multimillion-rand golf estate housing development included 60 hectares of municipal common land, traditionally used to graze their cattle. The developers gave the stock owners another piece of land as compensation but this is a rocky mountain with no



Golf courses use 1.2 to 3 million litres of water a day – enough for 30 million people

river where you can't plant anything.

A golf course is also contested as part of the land claim of the Umgungundlovu clan. They were removed from a fertile coastal strip of land in 1980 to make way for the luxury resort that became the Wild Coast Sun. Young clan members are threatening to plough up the golf course, and are talking of a violent land grab.

The proposed Blythedale golf estate on the KwaZulu-Natal north coast is presently the subject of a bitter land battle between the developers and the Dube community. The community lodged a claim in 1998 with the Land Claims Commission arguing that they had been forcibly removed from their ancestral land. The Commission declared their claim valid. According to the *Sunday Times* in June 2007 a R20-million offer to the community was rejected as "peanuts compared with what the developers would gain out of the project."

The establishment of the Blair Atholl golf estate near Johannesburg designed by Gary Player also involved the removal of 400 people.

Associated with this dispossession of local people's land are other problems such as the displacement of farm workers and inflated land

prices. A 2000 DEADP report points out that the inflated prices that are paid for agricultural land with a view to development prevents farmers from expanding their operations.

For instance, the report says that the "average price paid per hectare for agricultural land of 50ha or less in 2004 in the George area has been R42 751. But in one instance in excess of R293 000 ha was paid for land apparently with the view to golf estate type development."

A golf estate is planned at Woody Cape on prime agricultural land used for dairy farming. The farmer was paid R38-million for his 400 hectare farm which in 2007 according to a local farmer was "ten times the going rate for agricultural land in the area."

EXCLUSION FROM WATER

South Africa is a water scarce country. As Western Cape Environmental Minister Tasneem Essop said when she introduced ground-breaking guidelines in December 2005 for development of golf courses, golf estates and polo fields, "Our water resources are under threat."

Golf courses use on average 1.2 - 3 million litres of water a day. Using the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP)

calculation of 25 litres a day, this is equivalent to the basic amount for 30 million people, what 75% of South Africans should receive daily.

The exclusive River Club golf course obtains its water from the Jukskei River to maintain its manicured greens and emerald fairways, even during the Highveld winter, and on both my site visits sprinklers were operating in the mid-day sun.

While Pecanwood golf course uses over 1 million litres of water a day from the Hartebeestpoort dam, many of their workers lack access to water and electricity. The Pecanwood workers who live in an informal settlement known as 'Jan's place' have to walk 5 kms to buy water at R3 for 20 litres. This illustrates what Marx called "savage capitalism". Labour is "only a naked commodity", any sense of responsibility of the employer towards employees is dissolved.

Golf courses are also environmentally damaging in that they involve the destruction of indigenous vegetation and the harmful use of fertilisers, pesticides and herbicides. Ironically golf courses often involve appeals to nature, while destroying it. For example, the Zimbali golf estate ethos is "living in harmony with nature".

EXCLUSION FROM FISHING AND RECREATION

The Pecanwood golf estate denies access to traditional fishing sites on Hartebeestpoort Dam. The Fish River Sun golf course blocks access to the beach as do the Blythedal and Prince's Grant golf courses in KwaZulu-Natal.

EXCLUSION FROM HERITAGE SITES

A few miles west of East London there is a rocky cliff at the end of a wide, sandy beach. Known as "Gombo Rock" it is a place of great spiritual power and has great significance for Xhosa traditionalists. An historian has described it as "a scene of indescribable pathos to contemplate." Thousands of Xhosa converged here in 1819 after their defeat at the battle of Grahamstown, and their leader, Makana, declared that he would summon the Xhosa ancestors to rise from the sea and come ashore to help drive the white man from the land.

Today the mainly white inhabitants of the gated Cove Rock golf estate have erected an electrified fence which makes access to the beach impossible.

One of the world's most important early human habitation sites, with artefacts dating back to the Middle Stone Age, is being destroyed by water seeping on to it from the Pinnacle Point golf estate.

EXCLUSION FROM DECISION MAKING

As Peter Skara said of Bushman Sands, "Locals were not consulted about the loss of their communal grazing land. Of course this is true more broadly as many Environmental Impact Assessment procedures allow for very shallow public participation.

EXCLUSION FROM DECENT WORK

Some local employment is provided for maintenance workers, caddies, gardeners, domestic workers and security guards but it is largely casualised labour lacking security, regulation, decent wages and benefits. In this sense golf estates illustrate both exploitation AND exclusion.

Employment as caddies is sporadic. There were 30 young African men pressed against the wire fence of the Royal Port Alfred Golf Club hoping for employment as caddies earning R60 for 18 holes on the day I visited in 2007.

On that day only three were successful. According to the caddiemaster: "Most people take a golf cart at R150 a round. These people are very cruel. People say they don't like caddies because they steal, but they must steal. They have nothing. If I was hungry I would also steal".

The overall pattern seems to be that golf carts are preferred to caddies. At Zimbali the hire of golf carts is compulsory at R160 a cart. At the same time golf estates are often surrounded by desperately poor communities. Whenever I visited Cove Rock the entrance was crowded with men from the informal settlement of Fort Grey waiting in the hope of work as day

labourers or gardeners.

The establishment of golf courses and estates often involves a loss of employment as well as dispossession. For example, an exclusive R2-billion golf estate is being planned at Woody Cape, adjoining the Addo National Elephant Park. The farm workers employed on the existing dairy farm will lose their jobs.

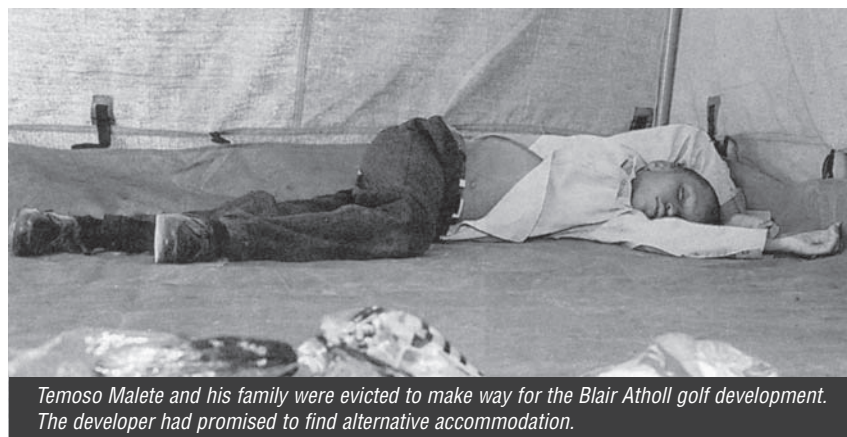
EXCLUSION OF SOCIAL CLASSES

Playing golf is a means of asserting class privilege; a vehicle of identity. In South Africa, as Starn has written of the USA "embracing a game with pricey equipment, elaborate etiquette and exclusive clubs allowed America's elites both to mark a special identity and to isolate themselves from their social inferiors."

A common feature of most golf courses is a social, class-based exclusivity. This is illustrated by the expensive nature of the game.

For example the elite River Club in Johannesburg to which Cyril Ramaphosa belongs, costs R250 000 to join and at Fancourt membership fees are R13 350, and R550 for 18 holes.

Furthermore, elaborate etiquette and dress codes are strictly imposed. For example, at Elements Private Golf Reserve north of Pretoria, it is,



Temoso Maleté and his family were evicted to make way for the Blair Atholl golf development. The developer had promised to find alternative accommodation.

The Citizen

“Strictly collared shirts with tailored trousers or shorts” and “...socks must be worn at all times”. At Eagle Canyon in Honeydew only white or light beige socks are allowed.

These class exclusions of cost and style are replacing the race-based exclusions of the past when golf courses were for whites only. One of the most dramatic changes in South Africa since 1994 is the rise of a black middle class among whom golf is a popular sport, though still a minority of players.

FEATURES OF EXCLUSION

Golf estates have the following features:

Social and spatial segregation

Estates are fortified enclaves of wealth. To cite some examples, recently a house at Zimbali golf estate, north of Durban which describes itself as “one part golf, two part paradise,” sold for R19-million. A new development, it will include six beachfront villas which will be priced from R30-million each. The Pinnacle Point Beach and Golf resort was voted by *Golf and Leisure* magazine as one of the ten best new golf courses in the world.

These golf estates illustrate what Steven Gill has called “a new politics of inequality” in the contemporary world. He writes, “This is a global phenomenon, where the affluent are increasingly not only economically, but also socially, spatially and politically segregated from the rest of society and especially from the poor of the world’s population (unless of course the poor are their domestic servants).”

Gill calls this process of social enclavisation, “a new medievalism that separates and segregates rich and poor communities.”

In this process the poor are often invisible. As Starns expresses it, “The white-collar masters of postmodern

corporate capitalism are welcomed into a fantasy island of ‘comfort’, ‘amenities’ and ‘luxury’ and the real world of poverty, inconvenience and social division is fenced out into invisibility.”

Fortification

These are fortified enclaves based on a new kind of class-based segregation. Golf estates are marked by an emphasis on security in all their promotional literature.

For example Zimbali is a secure gated estate with vehicle access controlled via two security entrance points manned 24 hours a day. The entire perimeter fence is patrolled on foot and a security control centre monitors pedestrian and vehicle access points via CCTV cameras. At Blair Atholl golf estate access involves biometric fingerprint technology.

Not contributing to development

The developers of golf estates frequently make extravagant claims about contributing to development and creating employment.

For example the *Business Day* in 2007 reported, “Empowerment millionaires Saki Macozoma, Bulelani Ngcuka and Dali Mpofu have launched a campaign, ‘Plough your millions back home’ to encourage other tycoons from the Eastern Cape Region to invest... Leading by example Saki Macozoma has taken a 25% stake in the company which is developing a R2-billion golf estate in Chintsa.”

A Pam Golding agent for golf estates refers to substantial benefits for “our local community.” Some employment is provided for local people but it is very limited and largely casualised labour, lacking security, regulation, a living wage or benefits.

In strong contrast to these patterns of exclusion, for ‘tycoons’ who are keen golfers such as Bululani Ngcuka

and Dali Mpofu golf is promoting inclusion into a new power elite that is marked by the co-existence of political and economic power.

As Blade Nzimande has stated, “The golf course is emerging as one terrain on which the relationship between the emergent sections of the black bourgeoisie and the state is being cemented.”

Former Gauteng premier Shilowa invited “players who do business with the provincial government as well as friends” to the Absa Premiers Invitational golf tournament which he hosted in 2007. The golf course is often an extension of the boardroom, and promotes an emerging ‘crony capitalism’.

CONCLUSION

Because in global terms golf is a multibillion dollar industry, some emphasise that the growth of golf in South Africa is a positive development which may contribute to economic growth, job creation, attract tourists and benefit surrounding communities. But to-date these benefits are very limited.

Golf courses also deepen social polarisation, and as the DEADP report says “deplete water resources, consume agricultural land, spoil landscapes and heritage resources, impact on biodiversity, impact on scenic landscapes, routes and heritage resources, displace and divide especially rural communities, and impact on access to resources such as the coast.” For all these reasons Finance Minister Trevor Manuel should think carefully about the National Union of Metalworkers president’s ironic offer for metal workers to make him a set of ‘golden golf clubs’.

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