Suburbanisation, segregation, and government of territorial transformations

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This paper chooses the example of suburban expansion in South Africa as a means of addressing the question of changing forms of segregation, particularly in relation to issues of government of the transformation of space. The South African suburbs became the place of residence of the mostly white middle and upper classes during, especially, the second half of the twentieth century – a period which, of course, also saw the entrenchment of apartheid. Whatever else apartheid may have involved, it saw a redistribution of resources from less favoured spaces and classes to the suburbs, which deepened patterns of segregation. Redistribution has in many respects continued to favour the suburbs since the formal end of apartheid a decade ago, but continued territorial transformation has seen new forms of segregation develop.

Suburbs and redistribution of real income in urban systems

The ways in which cities expand are certainly matters of distribution of income and wealth. Simply stated, geography matters, since urban expansion has costs as well as benefits, and the distribution of those costs and benefits affects not only the nature of daily life, but also the redistribution of income through the state and its organs as well as the direction of income flows and the accumulation of wealth. These effects occur individually through transport costs and property markets (for owners as well as tenants) with taxation as an added component. Businesses experience the same effects. And the costs of urban expansion to the state can vary substantially according to the forms of development. In consequence, struggles can occur between diverse groups who perceive that particular types of change will affect them positively or negatively.
Questions of distribution, particularly through the state, are once again rising in prominence, and affect not only the types of questions discussed by Castells (1977 for the English edition) some time ago concerning, for example, social housing – although such questions remain directly present in countries as diverse as France and Brazil (see for example Le Monde Argent 2003). Indeed the most obvious presence of these questions affects, in ways which are readily perceptible to individuals and civil society, such matters as pensions: witness the struggles over reform of the pension system in many social democracies over the last decade or more, in which the underlying issue is not merely the question of whether there are sufficient younger citizens to pay for the pensions of the retired, but the question of the way in which the state redistributes income, for example through tax cuts for the wealthy at the same time as requiring the low and middle income population to pay more over a longer period in order to qualify for lower pensions (Piketty 2003).

The ways in which the state regulates private development of land also directly impinge upon distribution of the social product – but there is much less consciousness of the relationships between the state and private developers which affect that distribution. At the periphery of many cities there is a movement away from a dirigiste state creating the spaces of development towards private interests shaping those spaces themselves. Increasingly, private developers prepare the plans, the ground and the infrastructure for such developments, as well as the buildings and their associated features, frequently connected with large entertainment facilities. In such cases, private developers and land owners have been finding new ways to make money at the periphery and in forms of redevelopment which the state attempts to shape through much more negotiation than in the past. A clear example can be found at the massive Bluewaters development in Kent, outside the M25 freeway encircling most of Greater London, where developers obtained permission to do something which not too long ago would have been considered literally beyond the planning pale, through negotiating investment in the public arena (road infrastructure, for example) in return for development rights. The consequence is a form of suburban commercial development on a scale previously unknown, with substantial consequences for various urban behaviours as well as public revenue. Even in France one finds tendencies in similar directions (Interview 2003); and similar processes can be observed in Brazil around the creation of such spaces as Alphaville outside São Paulo (Fiedler 2001). These changing
relationships between public and private sectors in planning and urban development may be a future arena for conflict, if indeed such conflict does not already exist.

In South Africa, suburban expansion reveals similar features. In Cape Town, the very large complex of commercial, entertainment, office and residential development at ‘Century City’, strategically located on the N1 freeway in the northern suburbs of the city, has dramatically altered the location of activity (Kalaora 2002). In the Durban case, the largest landowning company in the region has used its reserves of agricultural land to plan and develop a new complex known as ‘Gateway’ to the north of the city, adjacent to a major freeway and not far from well-developed beachfront tourist facilities – a development which challenges the scale of commercial activity in the central business district of the old city. To the north of Johannesburg, a prime example of such development can be found around the casino, commercial, hotel and increasingly residential, development known as ‘Montecasino’, again strategically located not far from the circular freeway system and adjacent to large existing and planned developments at ‘Fourways’. In each case the significance of the investments taking place is large, and has an effect yet to be measured on the spatial organisation of the city. In turn, the shifts in activity patterns alter the map of property values and make local governments more dependent on property tax revenue from these suburban locations. On one hand, these investments add infrastructure costs for local government, transport costs for citizens, and property market disparities which negatively affect those not associated with them. On the other, they provide income streams through taxation for local government (though they are often given tax relief for long periods). It can be argued that they add economic growth and are thus desirable, or instead that they divert necessary investment from places where the benefits to less-well-off populations would be much greater. In all cases there is no question that the regulation of land use change has retreated considerably and that private sector interests are playing a determining role in spatial change.

Thus far conflict around such developments has included particularly debate over the ‘environmental impact’ which they have, with ‘green’ concerns foremost. To an extent there is hostility, as in many American cases, to ‘urban sprawl’ which these complexes are presumed to represent. There is some awareness of their impact on the social geography of the city, including the forms of social and racial segregation which appear to be
associated with them. Debate over their financial implications, for local
government and for the general distribution of income and resources, is less
developed. And whereas in the United States such developments usually
occur in local municipalities beyond the boundaries of the city proper, in
South Africa, they are within the territory of the large new metropolitan
areas (and in some cases smaller local municipalities) created since the
dawn of a democratic era in the country in 1994.

In this context the impact of such developments poses the problem of
social segregation in new forms. Segregation is a large part of the history of
South African cities, in many senses: they are perhaps infamous for their
degree of racial residential segregation. Of course the end of formal
apartheid has accelerated processes of racial desegregation. Yet the changes
affecting the cities are far from being those of racial desegregation alone.
In suburban South Africa new relationships between public planning and
private sector interests have tended to intensify separations related to
income, wealth, and forms of employment.

**Changing forms of segregation in South African cities**

South African cities are sometimes regarded as the most urban parts of
Africa (south of the Sahara). Visiting them for the first time, Asians and
Europeans are surprised, perhaps, at the sophistication of some elements of
the built environment, but struck by how ‘unurban’ most are, especially by
comparison with Parisian or Singaporian peaks of northern urbanism. Yet
the differences of density, levels of services, and forms of urban life are
hardly a continuum simply from ‘less urban’ South Africa to ‘more urban’
Asia or Europe for the response of a visitor who saw only the shacks of
Khayelitsha or the aging public housing of New Brighton might contrast
sharply with that of someone who experienced only the high rise parts of
Durban or the newest suburban malls and office parks of Pretoria. And like
all urban spaces, none of these sections of South African cities stay the same
for ever, even though some might for periods of years or decades appear
more static than others. Especially after the demise of legal racial segregation
and the arrival of electoral democracy, almost every neighbourhood in
urban South Africa either experiences rapid change or anticipates it.
Change is encouraged by increasing openness of a once-protected economic
environment to wider global economies. The changes occurring are variously
up, down, ethnic, class, gendered, violent, peaceful, religious and in
manifold ways linked, with divergent results and extraordinary impact on
the linkages and separations between sections of the cities.
Most essays on post-apartheid urbanism stress one dimension of change: that away from apartheid. But before, during and certainly after apartheid, South African urban change is more complex than some simple linear process. For reasons of this complexity, I see them as places from which to learn, urban prisms (Mabin 1999) through which to gain insight into the shifting spectrum of global urbanisms. Like ‘cities after socialism’, the very rapid pace of change in cities after apartheid creates a laboratory for seeing aspects of how capitalist cities work and are at the end of the twentieth century (Szelenyi 1996: 316).

That said, like cities after socialism, great diversity persists among cities after apartheid. One cannot visit Johannesburg, Durban and Cape Town without feeling a profound sense of difference amongst them, in which their very different environmental settings play a role. Their commonalities as central places in South African society are strong yet their ranges of social difference and the intensities of division in their social geographies are obviously distinct. Any list of other urban places – the Free State goldfields, East London or Port Elizabeth, Nelspruit and other capitals of the post-1994 provinces – contains only part of those ranges. And some of these places may be the focus of much future growth.

The processes and patterns of change will be shaped, as elsewhere in the world, to an increasing extent by responses to crime, violence and policing, or the absence thereof (Bremner 1999). And those subjects point to a need not only to examine their own meanings in relation to urban social and racial segregation but also to move into the territory of social justice. Not only is the present in South Africa characterised by an unprecedented endeavour to accomplish social justice, with all manner of intersections with social geography, but both present changes and the future revolve in many respects around the conflicting desires to increase social justice and the processes which continue to produce its obverse.

The history of urban South Africa is, amongst other things, one of fragmentation of urban space, attempted segregation of state-defined groups in the population into those spaces, and surveillance and control of some of those spaces. The measures adopted were appalling, and have often been described as ‘crude’ (eg McAuslan 1993:238). However, the extent of both state bureaucracy and the operation of complex private markets in producing the effects of apartheid mean that the ways in which apartheid affected the cities requires sophisticated analysis (Mabin 1992). Amongst other things apartheid involved a ‘displacement’ of urbanisation into often far-flung
closer settlements, uneasily suspended between their essentially rural localities and the non-rural (that is non-agricultural) forms of social existence which they barely sustained. Such areas were readily termed ‘rural slums’ (eg Murray 1988). Apartheid had the effect of making any easy division between rural and urban politically as well as conceptually problematic, as may be seen in contemporary attempts to frame urban policy in the Department of Provincial and Local Government.

Apartheid certainly did accentuate the physical divisions of the cities (Harrison et al 2003). For example, a place like Batho, the old Bloemfontein location where the ANC was reputedly founded in 1912, is almost in the heart of the city. But the apartheid housing estates, the townships like Rocklands which make up the Mangaung5 of today, lie far away and widely separated from other parts of Bloemfontein. A pattern of knocking down older locations and moving people to physically separate township areas began under pre-apartheid regimes – thus Cape Town’s old Ndabeni, built in 1904, was destroyed and its residents largely moved to Langa in the 1930s. After 1948 apartheid sought to remove all the older cases like Ndabeni, to be replaced by places with names like Mdantsane (East London) and Katlehong (Germiston), not to mention most of well-known Soweto. This project mostly (but not by any means entirely) succeeded, and the physical separation of well-bounded black townships from other parts of the cities became a prominent fact, most unambiguous in smaller centres (consider Warden, Free State; or Cradock, Eastern Cape).

Within the townships, various forms of social segregation did exist, though the twin processes of restricting economic opportunity and limiting the variety of housing available set the tone of township space. A central feature was gender segregation, since compounds or ‘hostels’ which supplied cheap (and often nasty) accommodation occupied largely by people whose period of residence in urban areas, was limited through the application of pass laws and influx control were single-sex affairs – usually for men only. A fairly sharp distinction thus separated many who occupied the most menial positions in employment and lived (whilst in urban areas) in hostels, away from other sections of the population.

In many townships some sections became known as ‘smarter’ areas, though the small professional and business-oriented groupings who occupied them seldom did so alone. Thus Orlando West in Soweto, including extensions to a township mostly built before the Second World War, provided newer housing to which emerging better-off households sought to
move immediately after the War (including several well-known leaders of the ANC, the Sisulu and Mandela families among them). The opening of a leasehold area called Dube adjacent to Orlando allowed those with the means to build their own houses, thus creating a further degree of ‘class’ or at least occupational segregation – but far from a complete one (Parnell 1991).

During the early apartheid period, many authorities also tried to impose an ethnic or linguistic segregation on the townships. In some cases they succeeded to a degree, and there are still parts of places such as Daveyton (East Rand) and even Soweto which, despite a greater urban flux against a backdrop of housing shortage and official allocation practices, reveal concentrations of Sesotho, Siswati or isiZulu speakers (Christopher 1994).

The creation of these complex, sometimes sharp but often muted, forms of segregation occurred at the same time as the destruction of older communities and the removal of their residents to newer townships. The older communities thus destroyed, like Lady Selbourne in Pretoria, Etwatwa in Benoni and Sophiatown in Johannesburg, of course contained considerable social difference. For a start, they were by no means always exclusively black. But just as owners of houses in such areas often belonged to one language or colour group, and tenants of rooms or back yard shacks another, so income and other economic or social distinctions left even owners and tenants who shared language and colour socially distinct, if geographically cheek by jowl. Steve Lebelo’s (1988) work shows how much these distinctions shaped responses to forced removal to new townships, with owners generally and understandably strongly opposed, whilst at least some tenants welcomed the cheap access to better housing which the changes implied.

Since apartheid – through the destruction of the older locations, construction of the vast new townships, and the creation of the pattern of group areas segregation – had such an enormous impact on the shaping of the rapidly growing cities, it is easy to be distracted from developments outside the features described in preceding paragraphs. There is substantial academic writing on the legislation which framed racial residential segregation, in particular the Group Areas Act which provided for comprehensive racial segregation of the cities and some of its implementation (eg Nieftagodien 2001). But very little scholarship has explored what happened on the other side of the hill, valley or tracks, in areas reserved for whites, where immense changes took place and patterns of social segregation
were transformed during the forty-five years of apartheid. In a word, these changes can best be captured as suburbanisation. Roughly speaking, before 1960, most whites lived in rented, older, smaller spaces; after 1970, most were to be found in owner-occupied, newer, larger units (Chipkin 1999).

Life in the suburbs, whether in or out of the jurisdiction of the central cities, was in any event broadly similar, with generally low residential densities, property overwhelmingly in white hands, and commercial development restricted to local services. Infrastructure in the way of properly made roads, stormwater drainage, piped water, waterborne sewage, street lighting and so on spread unevenly both within and outside the central city areas over more than the first half of the century. The townships differed greatly from this image, usually with higher densities, public property, minimal services. The terminology reflected these realities, but the word ‘suburb’ masked the considerable differences – extreme in some cases – which marked their social characteristics.

While high-rise apartment complexes sprouted close to the centres of several cities, as at Hillbrow in Johannesburg and Sea Point in Cape Town, the post-war suburbs, like those of many other countries, spread away from the older commercial and industrial areas, close to which the majority of the white population had lived until the fifties. As elsewhere, their growth was driven and shaped by increasing automobile ownership and highway construction. Moving in most cases from rental to home ownership and assisted by various forms of subsidy for home ownership, many in the rapidly growing white population made the leap from older residential areas to newer suburbs through the fifties, sixties and seventies. Within these suburbs, of course, considerable class, ethnic and religious separation persisted. In some cases they were shaped by the location of schools of particular languages, and religious institutions. In others the existence of restrictive covenants, or as South Africans would say, restrictive conditions of title deeds, made for exclusion – for example, of Jewish people. Property markets fleshed out other patterns of social segregation, supported by ‘town planning’ restrictions (Mabin and Smit 1997) on the subdivisions of plots of an acre or more in some sectors – easily excluding most middle class people from the most expensive neighbourhoods, let alone the technicians, supervisors and others making up most of the white population. Some work done in the early seventies reveals the depth of social and economic segregation even within the white urban population (Hart 1975) – in part already a consequence of suburbanisation, with the poorer section ‘left
behind’ in the denser, older, tenanted areas of the cities.

Decompression: reform, changes in urban form, new patterns of segregation in the eighties

As the shortage of public rental units intensified due to the simple combination of population growth and cessation of construction in the seventies, the intensity of sharing and informal renting must have grown. The basis of such rental relationships seems largely to have been one of sympathy, rather than of accumulation (Gilbert et al 1997). The shortage of accommodation also led to two other forms of new residential growth. One, from the very end of the sixties onwards, was the emergence of informal (mainly shack, and unserviced) settlements, at first in places where the vagaries of bantustan boundaries put some land within daily striking distance of economic opportunity in the towns and later in favela form, in the interstices or on the fringes of urban areas (often thought of as ‘free standing shack settlements’). Second, and in contrast, was the use usually through rental arrangements, of space within the often fairly large lots of township units to erect shacks and later rows of rooms or flatlets – generally known as ‘backyard shacks’. Both types were generally disliked by authority, but unevenly; and by the end of the seventies or early eighties, were to a greater or lesser extent tolerated or even, in some cases, offered services – obviously a site of struggle over the distribution of the capacities of government. Comprehensive research in the Gauteng area ten years ago revealed that up to half of urban populations were living in these forms of settlement by that time, and conditions overall would probably support similar conclusions today (Sapire 1992).

A highly significant state response was to further entrench the spatial divisions of apartheid by acquiring land still more remote from commercial and other economic centres and to lay out ‘formal informal’ settlements, in which residents – often people moving more or less forcibly from backyard shacks in townships or elsewhere – could build their own structures. Huge new settlements emerged from this new policy which represented an abandonment of the long-standing official apartheid idea that blacks could not stay for ever in the cities. The best known are Orange Farm, Ivory Park, Zonkezizwe and New Etwatwa in the vicinity of Johannesburg, much of Khayelitsha (Cape Town), and Motherwell (Port Elizabeth), but there are literally hundreds of other similar settlements such as the ‘formal informal’ areas on the ‘far side’ of the townships of every Eastern Cape and Free State
town, now containing as many people at least as those in the older settlements. Some land invasions did occur and survive in this period, like Tamboville east of Johannesburg and Freedom Square in the Bloemfontein area and those which survived did so because they were essentially turned into parallels to the ‘formal informal’ areas. None of these settlements are socially homogenous (especially not those based on land invasions), but my impression is that they generally represent places in which the least skilled, youngest adults, and poorest paid live. In this sense, they are quite different from the circumstances of renting and sharing within the townships since they are producing a degree of social segregation which had not been distinctly developed previously within black society.

If the growth of the new settlement types of the eighties and early nineties (backyard shacks, freestanding shacks and ‘formal informal’) generally provided accommodation for people of lesser means, including the burgeoning urban unemployed, emerging processes of inequality among black South Africans also produced a dramatic growth in occupational classes able to afford far superior housing, as demonstrated by Owen Crankshaw’s painstaking study of race, class and the changing division of labour under apartheid (Crankshaw 1997). Some of that demand was met by the building of what I call ‘pseudo-suburbia’, private developer extensions of the townships within the racial constraints of location but with none of the other legal-economic restrictions which had compressed class differentiation and social segregation in the townships over previous decades. In the later eighties and early nineties, perhaps 100 000 houses were added to townships nationally along these lines (Hendler 1993).

While pseudo-suburbia sprouted on the fringes of townships, the form of the white suburbia which it imitated itself began to alter. As white population growth tailed off in the seventies, that population aged; other conditions changed, the nature of the property market altered. The state passed legislation allowing full registration of ‘sectional title’ – called condominium in some other places – to single buildings, thus for the first time allowing apartments to be individually owned. Rising land prices (though they remain relatively low by world standards) and security concerns, as well as departures from high-rise apartment land, drove a new form of development in the eighties: the so-called ‘townhouse’ complex, really not much different from row housing, and usually developed in the furthest flung sections of suburbia. These newest forms of suburban development come complete with walled perimeters and guard houses (in all but the cheapest cases): they
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are the new compounds of urban South Africa, representing tightly defended social segregation (see Jürgens and Gnad 2000, Beall et al 2002 Chapter 10, Bremner 2002, and Jürgens et al 2003). In some respects they are a private response to the failure of the state to maintain the quiet conditions of white suburban life of the not-too-distant past – whether a response to perception or to reality. And they are attractive to those who flee more dangerous conditions elsewhere too, as I will mention further below. They symbolise in the suburbs the changed forms of residential segregation which have begun in earnest to replace those, long in decline, of the old urban regime of apartheid.

The recreation of urban space which has been summarised above has provided a backdrop to other shifts which made the nature of the urban environment more complex. As Alan Morris’ work shows most clearly, a trickle and then a rush of people disqualified by the Group Areas Act (see above) from doing so, nevertheless began the still-illegal move to ‘white space’ (Morris 1994). Rental accommodation provided the opportunity at first. Such openings were to be found both in older white low density residential areas, to some extent left behind by suburbanising residents, as well as in high rise apartment sections. These processes of change were uneven, driven by shifts in the racial division of labour, and as a result were much more advanced in Johannesburg than elsewhere but few places remained totally untouched into the eighties. But by absolutely no stretch of the imagination did any of these changes result in what some have termed ‘the deracialisation of space’ (eg Saff 1994). What is more, new lines of division have developed far more strongly, best represented to date by Beall et al (2002).

Less researched than the ‘desegregation’ of the older rental areas – a partial desegregation in colour terms, certainly not those of class – a clutch of other processes of urban change further affected the cities in the eighties. These changes affected the relative position of all neighbourhoods, since they began to undercut the previously unchallenged centrality of central business districts. Although considerable commercial decentralisation had taken place in most cities during preceding decades, it was in the eighties that middle class shopping moved much more substantially to the suburbs. Features familiar in North America and western Europe emerged: department store closures in CBDs, shopping mall and hypermarket development in suburban and exurban locations. Both the physical sprawl of the suburbs, to which reference has already been made, and considerable highway
construction in the seventies and eighties, laid the foundations for these developments. In turn, they allowed new forms of social segregation: CBDs in many cases (Johannesburg, East London, Germiston) began to become the shopping centres of those without private cars – in most cases black residents of townships and newly integrating inner city areas. By contrast, the suburban malls afforded more affluent (and in many cases overwhelmingly white) citizens motorised access to increasingly specialised stores. In turn, investment in suburban commercial activity deepened divides between township and suburb, with the former sharing little of the public revenues derived from new developments.

Thus in the 1970s surveillance and control began to break down; in the 1980s, though racial segregation (never complete) began to dissipate while struggle raged in the townships, a weak attempt to reform apartheid fostered a new discourse on the future of the cities; as the 1990s began, among key issues facing the cities was how to overcome the fragmentations of politics and of space. The new governments elected democratically both nationally and provincially in 1994, and locally in a semi-democratic fashion in 1995 or 1996, faced huge challenges in these areas.

**Post-apartheid segregation and the rising significance of suburbs**

There are of course some important symbols of integration and there have been features of very considerable urban racial desegregation. For example, what has happened in the schools bears comment. It is quite extraordinary to contrast the procession of black and white children away from formerly whites-only schools in the suburbs, every weekday afternoon, with what one might have experienced until less than fifteen years ago. In some respects, of course, what is interesting is that these now-shared spaces support the reproduction of the middle classes which increasingly segregate themselves from the less well off. The paths out of the townships are little trodden by outsiders moving in the opposite direction, and the township schools remain.

The schools provide symbols both of the division and sharing of space. What was ‘white’ was never fully so. It was always (with rare exceptions) open to black involvement, as menial servants or otherwise, even though so strongly defended against the intrusion of blacks as equals. What was ‘black space’ was indeed black, little open to penetration by whites. The white spaces of South African cities have been occupied with relative ease by some blacks since 1990 or 1994 (only relative ease: see Mabote 2003), but
the black spaces remain just that – with exceptions like the shebeens on
tours of Soweto – much less penetrable to whites. A key element in these
divisions has long been language, which continues amongst other things to
separate groupings in otherwise integrated schools: witness the contrast
between weekday integration in formerly white schools, and weekend
segregation amongst the students. At the same time there are semi-integrations
in new forms of some private-public spaces, like the new ‘Zone’ shopping
and entertainment complex in the Rosebank area of Johannesburg (Nuttall
2004).

On the more material terrain of housing and urban development, a
political paralysis of local government set in during the era of negotiation
(1989-94), and in many places held back new directions of local government
action - including at least parts of the major metropolitan areas. Where local
authority has been more effective, some of the deprivations of apartheid
have begun to be addressed. Thus Cato Manor in Durban, one of the largest
and best known sites of urban destruction of old, mixed communities in the
high apartheid period, has seen considerable efforts at redevelopment (as
well as the formation of favelas) (Robinson 1997). The last minute reprieve
from destruction of other old communities, like Dukathole, an old location
or black area in Germiston near Johannesburg, has seen not only new
‘squatting’ but some revitalisation. But in general, local government has
failed to respond to the challenges, with consequent land invasion and
favela formation. Its most coherent responses to the pressures for residential
space is often to reproduce the remote, partly serviced, ‘formal-informal’
settlements of the late apartheid period, at places like Diepsloot north of
Johannesburg. Such areas are often associated with the private sector
construction of new housing supported by the national housing subsidy
scheme, really based on ideas formulated around the Urban Foundation (a
private sector NGO) in the mid eighties and actualised by the Independent
Development Trust in the early nineties.

Little has occurred in the physical environment to match the
accomplishment (almost unimaginable in its own right until ten years ago)
of unified and elected municipal authority. The notions of socially integrated
new developments somehow physically linking towns and townships has
received little real support. For example, a well-known optimistic project
to ‘link’ Soweto into the fabric of Johannesburg, called Bara Link, has made
little headway: as a Dutch commentator observed, ‘So far there isn’t much
to see of Bara Link. On the other hand, free enterprise is creating one
complex after another in the northern periphery of the metropolis’ (De Meulder 1998). The evidence suggests that new investment, particularly globally-sourced and connected investment, goes to spaces in the north of the city, ‘suburban’, ‘edge’ city (Goga 2003).

Thus it should not surprise that the planning system has certainly not yet reached the point at which it can constrain an accelerating process of suburbanisation. For one of the most significant developments of the nineties is the massive decentralisation of offices and office work from older CBDs – something evident in every city (East London is a good example of a smaller city where the process is advanced), but most developed in Johannesburg. There, the new locations of offices in ribbons along previously residential major roads, and in concentrations around some of the larger suburban commercial nucleations, has moved faster for a number of reasons. Among them are: far reaching changes in the organisation of work and the division of labour, with subcontracting of service provision and consequent impact on desirable office location; dysfunctionality in older CBDs, with failure on the part of local government to arrest its worsening and white racism, encouraging a work flight to the suburbs from the perception of a black and dangerous CBD (with some gendered components). The roles of property brokers in stoking the relevant perceptions has begun, belatedly, to receive some attention in the press (Mnyanda 1998).

This dramatic process of suburbanisation and dispersal of work follows the necessary previous stages of commercial and residential suburbanisation. It has a long way to run, and will yet wreak enormous impacts on the geographies of cities (Cape Town is a prime case, where even commercial decentralisation has a long way to go). It has, of course, profound meaning for social segregation. Just as it becomes possible for black residents to strike out towards the old centres of wealth and power in the CBDs, just as that success was symbolised by the location of new public institutions (such as the new provincial capitals) in the CBDs of some cities, so much of the economic opportunity which those centres had represented flees to the suburbs. Indeed, even new government in some cases flees to the suburbs: thus the Mpumalanga provincial government has built its large and impressive buildings adjacent to a large new shopping mall, casino, hotel and commercial complex at ‘Riverside’, outside the town centre of Nelspruit and even further from the townships in which the majority of the several hundred thousand citizens of that urban area actually live. There are many other less
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striking examples of government agencies choosing suburban locations since 1994. Only in a few cases has government really put its investment where its commitment to defragmentation lies, one good illustration being in the Northern Cape provincial government choosing to place its capital buildings, completed in 2003, between Kimberley and its large Galeshewe township (Silverman and Low 1999).

One shift, whose importance to the social geography of the cities is yet to be judged, lies in the residential preferences of the new elites associated with the political, and to some extent economic, changes in South African society. With the dispersion of upper-income consumption and work opportunities to the suburbs, and with the supposed security advantages of the walled complex, so it comes about that the shift to class rather than race segregation, the shift from state to market forms of segregation, sees not simply a replacement of colours within an older social geography – but an entirely new pattern of middle class blacks taking up residence in townhouse complexes which can scarcely be completed fast enough to satisfy the demand. Consider that the first four years of democratic government (1995-1998) saw a shift from 22 per cent of managerial positions in the civil service being occupied by blacks, to 60 per cent; that the gross numbers involved are large, perhaps meaning 50 000 new demands for access to middle class housing (with many more in the private sector) over the first five years; and more since then, details of which are revealed by 2001 census; that the impact on several cities is exaggerated by the abandonment of old bantustan capitals; and that the shifts in the private sector are at least as profound, coming on top of decades of change in the racial division of labour; that the changes continue; and it follows that the present changes in social segregation are of considerable scale. But it does not follow that the disabilities of the apartheid city are being overcome for a majority of its residents.

At least as important to the spatial organisation of the city, centrality in the city has fragmented over time, not only due to a diffuse social centrality flowing from enforced racial residential segregation but also due to the periodic development of new business centres, at distances from the original centre. This displacement is of course not unique to South African cities, being found from Los Angeles to Bangkok. In some respects Johannesburg is more closely paralleled by São Paulo, Brazil, where newer centres have challenged and complicated the issue of centrality in the city – also a site of extremely unequal distribution of income yet very considerable
resources. Whereas in São Paulo one might speak of the progressive development of areas around Avenida Paulista, Avenida Faria Lima and Avenida Behini, Johannesburg has newer centres at Rosebank, Sandton and Fourways. It is Sandton which captures most attention and most investment, with most international companies locating their offices there, and with the significant move of the Johannesburg Stock Exchange (now called the JSE Securities Exchange) to Sandton in the very recent past. The recomposition of patterns of work, with many more smaller offices dispersed through former residential areas and along major roads previously ‘protected’ by land use regulation, has revolutionised the distribution of employment.

This set of movements and associated shifts in the ‘status’ of residential addresses has challenged the long standing basic geography of the city, leading at least one geographer to suggest that the northern suburbs are becoming a ‘neo-apartheid city’ with new forms of exclusion through property prices (Beavon 2000) and, I would add, the labour market. Thus a perceptive commentator on politics and governance in South Africa, Hein Marais (2000), has noted that ‘suburbanisation in Johannesburg is not just a temporary kink, a kind of collective tic in the face of change. It entails a massive relocation of material and political power towards specific city zones, where the middle classes recongregate and regroup’. Younger populations see the new forms as ‘normal’, including those who seek quiet and security through the large number of ‘gated communities’ of diverse types which have developed particularly in the northern suburbs of Johannesburg and were referred to above. Popular perceptions of many residents, including many foreigners working for periods in the city, consider these spaces to be ‘a normal environment, like it should be’ (comment from a well-known golfer who lives in a security estate, quoted in Burdett 2001:21). To some extent these shifts are a response to crime, violence and insecurity, for which Johannesburg is apparently infamous (Bremner 1999). But in reality such pathologies are concentrated in the townships and often relate to domestic situations (Palmary et al 2003).

Johannesburg, like the other cities and towns in the country, thus presents ‘geographies of exclusion’ in the words of a French scholar (Guillaume 2002). A crucial component of this pattern is the presence of substantial populations in very poor accommodation ‘which reinforce[s] an impression of stark class inequalities’ (Bernstein and McCarthy 2002:23). The changes described here occur against a backdrop of rapid growth in at least some cities, and a disproportionately rapid growth of households relative to
overall population – which may be associated with wider choice and the pace of housebuilding as well as informal settlement development. The suburbs may be absorbing some of that growth in household numbers, both because of, and causing, changing patterns of social and racial segregation.

**And governing territorial transformation?**

The post-apartheid period offers less on the restructuring of apartheid urban space than it does on the development of new forms of social division, bringing the South African city close to others which show some similar problems, from São Paulo and Mexico City to Pittsburgh (Connolly et al. 2003). A key question for the city, then, is whether or not these social exclusions and spatial fragmentations can be overcome. This question fascinates not only because of the empirical trajectories of market driven change in the Pretoria or Durban suburbs but because of the enduring appeal of the defeat of apartheid as a symbol for movements for social justice everywhere.

In the heady excitement of the immediate post apartheid period, many felt positive on this subject. In particular the geography of the apartheid city seemed a target for democratic rearrangement. But experience has demonstrated over the past decade that denting the ‘geographies of exclusion’ through policy and planning is very difficult indeed. The ‘neo-apartheid’ geographies of exclusion, involving both the heritage of racial division and the workings of property and labour markets, are also a product of increasing global connection. In addressing the problems of the city, herein lies a spatial challenge for governance in the present period. Municipal government has thus far responded hardly at all to this change, except to turn to trumpeting the receptivity of the new, suburban, environments to global corporations, through this presentation perhaps creating the phenomenon of the ‘double vitrine’: the newer, globally connected spaces of finance and business as the public ‘shop window’ whilst the mounting poverty and exclusion characteristic of large sections of ‘the townships’ and some inner city areas is hidden away, to a considerable extent, in the ‘back room’ of the shop (Benit and Gervais-Lambony 2005, this issue).

Local government in South Africa has historically been, and remains, concerned primarily with the delivery of urban services to residents and businesses – water, electricity, waste disposal, road building and maintenance and so on. It has almost always had only limited health, safety and policing functions, and has no responsibility for education, which of course looms
large in the politics of local government in many other countries. In South Africa, the latter is primarily a provincial activity, with substantial national involvement. The main financial basis of local government is twofold – property taxes, mostly historically charged on land values alone, called ‘rates’ in the English tradition; and charges for services, particularly electricity delivered by the city. The fragmentation of the city in the long era of segregation and apartheid implies an extremely complex history which awaits much more scholarly attention.

The initial period of reform of local government after apartheid was based on national negotiation in 1993 before the first democratic elections. Initial change up to 1996 resulted in the erasing not only of the boundaries dividing black and white local authorities, with their own shorter and longer histories, but also the independent suburban municipalities such as Randburg and Sandton to the north of Johannesburg, Westville beyond Durban, and Bellville in the northern suburbs of Cape Town – some created American-style in the 1960s. On the world scene this elimination of suburban jurisdictions, completed with the creation of single metropolitan councils (no longer with subcouncils) for the 2000 local elections, was almost revolutionary. But the constitutional changes in local government provide only the backdrop for a period in which suburbanisation persisted in force whilst other radical changes in urban governance included corporatism and privatisation and a turn to strategic planning more concerned with economic growth than with redistribution. A particularly clear illustration of this turn can be found in the adoption by the Johannesburg council of Joburg 2030 in 2002 (City of Johannesburg 2002) – a strategic plan with a long term view which stresses the resolution of educational and crime problems as necessary to encouraging investment and the achievement of economic growth.

The spatial expressions of this strategic planning process have more recently been pursued, and proposals include spatial limits to suburbanisation as well as many of the other typical components of modernist planning, including corridors of development and so on. But the capacity to enforce such types of planning is definitely not present in South African cities, for personnel and political reasons amongst others (Watson 2002). Additionally, there is quite possibly a direct contradiction between the idea of an ‘urban edge’ as a limit and the commitment to the most rapid possible economic growth represented in the strategic planning of every municipality. For the latter in the present global period absolutely connotes allowing private investors to choose the localities which they consider most profitable, and
in most cases, to prepare the terrain for themselves – as they are already doing as described at the start of this article. This reality stalks all attempts to move urban planning towards directing the location of investment whether through government or through more participative planning processes, as much of the experience of ‘development planning’ in the new local authorities has shown (Mabin 2002a, 2002b).

As a result, government, including local government in South Africa, led in most cases by the ANC, is gambling on the chance that rapid economic growth will produce the revenue, through taxation, which will allow authorities to expand the provision of good quality services to the excluded populations and in particular to deprived areas of the cities. Public authority is certainly not engaged in geographical engineering to address spatial forms of racial or wider social segregation. South African cities have certainly changed since the demise of apartheid – in a wide range of political, social, economic and cultural ways – and the post-apartheid period has certainly seen redistribution of some resources in favour of particular disadvantaged places and people. But the longstanding redistribution of resources from less favoured spaces and classes to the suburbs has continued to deepen patterns of social segregation. This article has suggested that at present real income is being redistributed in the urban system towards and not away from the successful, self-planning, private development industry. Whether or not that continues to be the case is, perhaps, open to the future. But there is not yet any indication of a struggle around this form of redistribution of the social product through the ways in which the cities are developing.

The consequence is that despite the existence of policy documents and even legislation fostering ‘integration’, ‘compact cities’ and so on, South Africa’s cities continue to suburbanise, with all the segregatory consequences which have been indicated above, and with few de-segregating components (though those do exist, as also mentioned). At present the governance of territorial transformation in South African cities is a stunted child, whose parents – the public and private sectors, not the rest of civil society – show little practical interest in its future growth. The question both for South African citizens and for others is, in the light of this experience, whether or not the same tendencies are growing in strength elsewhere; or whether new forms of governance of territorial transformation may be developing in ways unforeseen until now.
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Notes
2. This phrase obviously derives from Harvey (1973).
3. This point should not be read as endorsing a view that ‘complexity’ consists in some form of coexistence of ‘first world’ and ‘third world’ elements. The range of features of South African cities is present in both supposed sets. We might note that this idea of cities as first-and-third world is hardly unique to South Africa. The image of the postmodern city as a combination of first and third world is, for example, offered by Michael Dear (1995: 40). But the developing polarisations to which this image supposedly refers have been obvious to observers of cities in other parts of the world for decades. In South Africa the idea of society as a combination of first and third worlds very frequently lapses into racism, or at least is used to legitimate persistent separations – including those between new elites and the expanding poor population. This discourse goes back to modernisation economics (without the deeper meaning of ‘dual economy’) and diverts from understanding urban society, however segregated it may appear to be, as one phenomenon with many intersections, dependencies and overlaps between its apparently separate elements. See also Robinson (2002, 2004).
4. Respectively, a large, overwhelmingly black area on the fringes of Cape Town, created since the mid 1980s; and a complex of black public housing ‘townships’ built since 1904 on the north side of Port Elizabeth.
5. Mangaung is to Bloemfontein as Soweto is to Johannesburg; but the name Mangaung has now been adopted for the entire urban area centred on Bloemfontein, whilst Johannesburg’s council has retained this name.
6. Group areas were often divided by such features, as seen in the deeply incised river valleys of Durban, the limestone hills of Port Elizabeth or the railways and major roads of many towns.

References
Suburbanisation, segregation, and government of territorial transformations


Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press.
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**Interviews**