

# The Apartheid City and Beyond

Urbanization and Social Change in South Africa

*Edited by*  
David M. Smith

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## THE APARTHEID CITY AND BEYOND

Apartheid as legislated racial separation substantially changed the South African urban scene. Race 'group areas' remodelled the cities, while the creation of 'homelands', mini-states and the 'pass laws' controlling population migration constrained urbanization itself.

In the mid-1980s the old system—having proved economically inefficient and politically divisive—was replaced by a new policy of 'orderly urbanization'. This sought to accelerate industrialization and cultural change by relaxing the constraints on urbanization imposed by state planning. The result: further political instability and a quarter of the black (or African) population housed in shanty towns.

Negotiations between the nationalist government and the African National Congress are working towards the end of the old apartheid system. Yet the negation of apartheid is only the beginning of the creation of a new society.

The vested interests and entrenched ideologies behind the existing pattern of property ownership survive the abolition of apartheid laws. Beyond race, class and ethnicity will continue to divide urban life. If the cities of South Africa are to serve all the people, the accelerating process of urbanization must be brought under control and harnessed to a new purpose.

The contributors to this volume draw on a broad range of experience and disciplines to present a variety of perspectives on urban South Africa.

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Urbanization and Social Change in  
South Africa

edited by

**David M. Smith**

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## *Preface*

This book is designed to replace an earlier volume entitled *Living under Apartheid: Aspects of Urbanization and Social Change in South Africa*, published by George Allen & Unwin in 1982. The intervening years have seen significant and at times dramatic change in South Africa, culminating in the release of Nelson Mandela in 1990 and the subsequent engagement of the National Party government and the African National Congress in negotiation towards a new constitution. The erosion of aspects of racial discrimination which began in the early 1980s has continued, and attention is now focused on the formation of a democratic and non-racial 'post-apartheid' society.

But despite these developments, much remains to be done. In particular, the accelerating process of urbanization has to be brought under control, and harnessed to a new social purpose. South African life will continue to become increasingly urban, offering scope for material advancement for some but perhaps merely the relocation of dire poverty for others. Turning cities which were substantially remodelled under half a century of apartheid into places of real opportunity for the mass of the people, rather than of privilege for a minority, is one of the major challenges facing the new South Africa.

This volume provides a series of original contributions on a variety of topics related to urbanization and social change in South Africa. Most are concerned with the impact of apartheid, as it effected housing, community life, settlement forms, and the servicing of the cities. Far from merely dwelling on a best-forgotten past, these studies help to explain how the cities of South Africa came to be as they are: the locus of people's present lives and a major constraint on new urban forms. But we also try to look ahead, to a post-apartheid city, with hope tempered by understanding that the struggle for more egalitarian cities has only just begun.

The authors whose research is assembled here come from a variety of backgrounds, generations and institutions (and indeed racial classifications, as along as apartheid's odious race-group fetishism survives). Although many practise geography in South African universities, some affiliate with other disciplines or professions requiring or sensitive to

a spatial perspective. They demonstrate a diversity of theoretical orientation and methodological practice, which gives the collection a healthy eclecticism. They also reflect different prescriptions for the post-apartheid order. What brings the authors together here (in addition to the intrinsic quality of their work) is the conviction, shared with the editor, that careful analysis of the past and present, brought to bear on the problems of the future, is a necessary (if not sufficient) condition for the creation of cities to serve all the people.

Grateful acknowledgements are due to Roger Jones at what was then Unwin Hyman for initial encouragement of this project, to Susan West for seeing it through and to the authors for their contributions and cooperative responses to editorial reaction. The compilation and editing of the collection was greatly assisted by a visit to South Africa in 1989, supported by the Students' Visiting Lecturers Trust Fund of the University of Natal and by the Hayter Fund of the University of London. A further visit in 1990, supported by the Human Sciences Research Council through the good offices of the University of Cape Town, facilitated discussions with most of the contributors at the draft stage. The opportunity provided by various individuals and institutions to combine work on this book with other research, wider academic interaction and the occasional relaxation was very much appreciated. I am also grateful for the encouragement of the London Office of the African National Congress, with whom consultation took place before visiting South Africa.

Special thanks are due to Keith and Pat Beavon, Ron and Shirley Davies and Denis and Betty Fair, for their limitless hospitality. To drop, almost literally, out of the sky to a welcoming 'brai' or bed has made visiting South Africa so much more than an academic experience. And to have had such distinguished South African geographers as friends as well as professional colleagues, over so many years, has been a great privilege, and also a frequent reminder of how much some of us still have to learn. Admiration as well as acknowledgement also goes to those who my own advancing years tempt me to term the younger generation, prominently represented in the pages of this volume. Their commitment to a new society is building bridges between those hitherto separated by the idiocy of academic apartheid, helping to bury at least that part of the past in the process of forging a new and truly progressive South African geography and urban studies.

Finally, to the one who went while I was away, and to those who miss him.

DAVID M.SMITH

Loughton, Essex

*February 1991*

## *Introduction*

DAVID M.SMITH

These restless broken streets where definitions fail—the houses the outhouses of white suburbs, two-windows-one-door, multiplied in institutional rows; the hovels with tin lean-tos sheltering huger old American cars blowzy with gadgets; the fancy suburban burglar bars on mean windows of tiny cabins; the roaming children, wolverine dogs, hobbled donkeys, fat naked babies, vagabond chickens and drunks weaving, old men staring, authoritative women shouting, boys in rags, tarts in finery, the smell of offal cooking, the neat patches of mealies between shebeen yards stinking of beer and urine, the litter of twice-discarded possessions, first thrown out by the white man and then picked over by the black—is this conglomerate urban or rural? No electricity in the houses, a telephone an almost impossible luxury: is this a suburb or a strange kind of junk yard? The enormous backyard of the whole white city, where categories and functions lose their ordination and logic...

...a 'place'; a position whose contradictions those who impose them don't see, and from which will come a resolution they haven't provided for.

Nadine Gordimer, *Burger's Daughter* (1979)

This commentary on a black 'township' seems no less apposite as an evocation of settlement in South Africa today than it did a decade ago. It captures something of both the life and the landscape of apartheid, reflecting the prevailing confusion as to the very nature of the urban condition in this strange society. It also hints at the central significance of urbanization under apartheid: that those places imposed by the white government on the black majority have taken on a life of their own, rebounding on the system to its discomfort and ultimate demise. Very simply, urbanization under apartheid, no matter how carefully the state contrived to control it, has undermined apartheid itself, bringing South

## 2 INTRODUCTION

African society and its cities to the brink of significant if still uncertain change.

Since the doctrine of apartheid as legislated racial separation was introduced following the National Party's assumption of power in 1948, it has been inextricably bound up with urbanization. At the national scale, the creation of so-called 'homelands' or 'bantustans' for the African majority of the population, was largely an attempt to constrain urbanization, with the notorious 'pass laws' controlling entry to the cities to levels consistent with demands for labour. Once in the cities, Africans were expected to be no more than temporary sojourners, there only as long as required by the white economy. Ideally they would be single migrant workers, but those who qualified for permanent and perhaps family settlement were still expected to look to the homelands for their 'political rights'. And residential segregation was obligatory, along with conformity to the day-to-day indignity of 'petty apartheid' under legislation enabling the provision of separate amenities for different race groups.

That rigid constraints on urbanization were inconsistent with economic efficiency as well as with personal liberty soon became clear. A sophisticated workforce, of the kind required by the manufacturing and service industries steadily displacing mining from its earlier pre-eminence, could not be expected to emerge from a disenfranchised and insecure proletariat who were supposed to identify with an often unfamiliar mini-state many miles away. A large and evidently permanently settled urban African population existed well before the Nationalists were finally forced to come to terms with reality, in a new policy of 'orderly urbanization' set out in the 1986 White Paper on Urbanization. Now, the urbanization of the African population was to be turned from problem to solution, with the processes of industrialization and cultural change expected to transform a discontented and threatening people into more compliant members of a mass-consumption society.

The outcome has hardly been orderly, however. Coinciding with the privatization impulse elsewhere (in Britain under the Thatcher government, for example), the state largely abandoned its earlier role as direct provider of housing for urban Africans, manifest in construction of the familiar townships. Very simply, it sought the benefits of accelerated urbanization but without bearing all the enormous costs. A consequence has been the spread of spontaneous or 'shack' settlements around the major metropolitan areas, to the extent of accommodating an estimated 7 million or a quarter of the African population today. And strict segregation broke down in parts of some cities, as black people seeking the advantages of inner-city residence were able to evade the restrictions of racial 'group areas' legislation. Thus the archetype apartheid city as elaborated by Davies (1981; see also Lemon 1987:220–21; [Fig. 19.1](#) in this volume), with its racially exclusive as well as class-divided wedges of formal urban

development, has undergone substantial change during the past decade (Simon 1990; Lemon 1991).

This book addresses various aspects of the creation and transformation of the apartheid city, in the general context of the urbanization process in a changing society. The purpose of this Introduction is briefly to set the scene, providing such basic information as is required for readers largely unfamiliar with urban South Africa to engage the chapters that follow. Up-to-date background on apartheid more generally can be found in Smith (1990).

### *The people of South Africa*

Not even basic population data for South Africa can be provided without qualification and explanation of its peculiarities. The latest (1989) mid-year estimate of the total population of the Republic of South Africa (RSA) is 30.2 million. However, this excludes about 6.5 million people resident in four of the homelands which have the official status of 'independent republics' (see Fig. 1), and are therefore no longer considered the responsibility of the South African government. The remaining six 'self-governing territories' are included as part of the Republic, however, although they are not directly administered from Pretoria. How long this distinction, and indeed the homelands themselves, will survive the current process of political change remains to be seen; reincorporation within the RSA of those territories currently considered independent seems increasingly likely.

The next, crucial complication is the racial classification of the population, itself central to the implementation of apartheid. The African or negroid population of the RSA, officially termed 'Black', was estimated to be 21.1 million in mid-1989, almost exactly three-quarters of the total, and to this can be added virtually all the population of the independent homelands. People classified as 'white' numbered almost 5.0 million, or 16.5 per cent (falling to 13.6 per cent if the independent homelands are included). The population classified as 'coloured' is 3.2 million (10.5 per cent of the RSA total). The final official category is the 'Asians', often referred to as Indians, comprising 940,000 or 3.1 per cent of the Republic's total.

Each of the four official population groups is subject to internal differentiation. About 55 per cent of the whites are Afrikaners by the criterion of language used at home (Afrikaans, a derivative of Dutch), the remainder being largely of British decent. The so-called coloured population is predominantly of mixed European and indigenous African ancestry, though there are also about 200,000 Malays. With the exception of a few thousand Chinese, the Asians are descended from immigrants from the Indian subcontinent; about 70 per cent are Hindus and 20 per cent



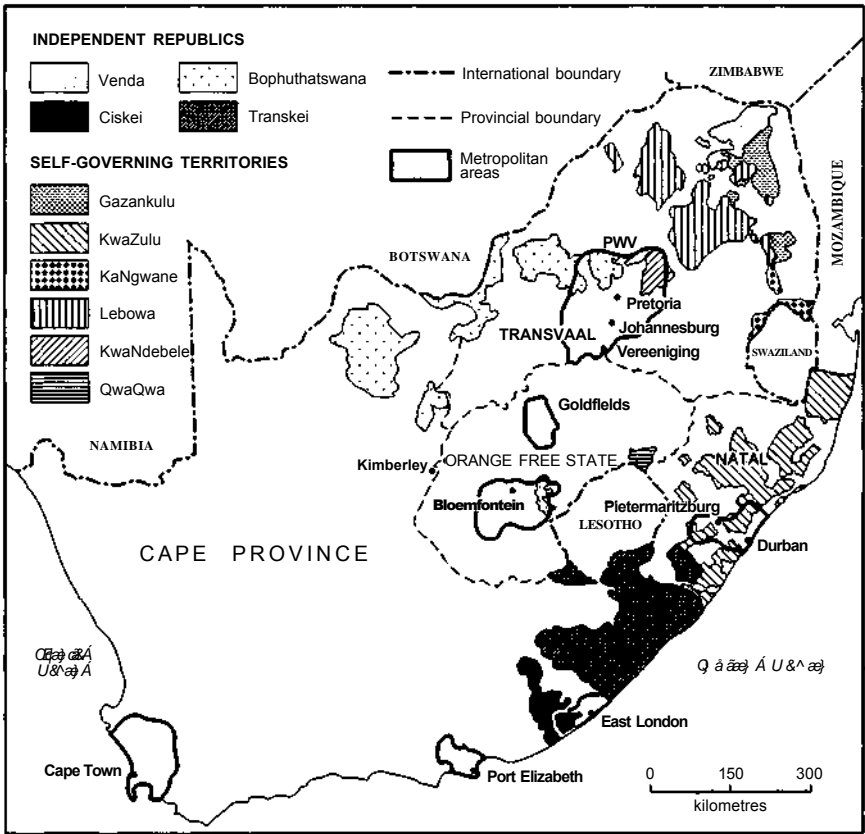


Figure 1 South Africa's homelands and metropolitan areas.

Muslims. The Black population is officially divided into ten tribal groups, the most numerous being the Zulu (about 6.4 million) and Xhosa (6.2 million). Almost 16 million of the Blacks live in the ten homelands, the remaining 11.5 million being in what is sometimes described, with blatant error, as 'white South Africa'.

Racial nomenclature in South Africa is controversial as well as complicated. 'Black' is sometimes used to refer to all those not classified as white (which can be an expression of political solidarity), as well as to the African population previously known officially as Bantu and earlier as Natives. Throughout this book the term 'black' with lower-case 'b' is adopted for the broader usage, to incorporate those classified coloured and Asian as well as Africans. The term 'Black' capitalised is confined to the official usage, synonymous with African. All such terms, including 'white', are taken to refer to social constructs embedded in the apartheid system,

and not natural subdivisions of humankind in South Africa or anywhere else. Similarly, to describe part of South Africa or its cities as 'white' refers to an official designation, without reference to the legitimacy or even factual accuracy of such racially exclusive occupancy. And, to complete this necessary apologia, such terms as 'homeland' or 'group area' are used throughout this book as part of what is to be understood, and in no way to dignify the contorted lexicon of apartheid.

Enumeration of the urban population of South Africa depends crucially on the definition of urban. Official census figures for 1985 class 89.6 per cent of the white population of the RSA as urban (about 4.1 million), 77.8 per cent of the coloureds (2.2 million), 93.4 per cent of the Asians (767,000) and 39.6 per cent of the Blacks or Africans (6.0 million), to give a total urban population approaching 13.7 million. At about 58 per cent of the Republic's total population, this is roughly comparable with the proportion living in urban areas in such countries as Hungary, Poland and Tunisia. However, these findings depend crucially on the validity of the figure for African urbanization. Some authorities consider that this could actually be as high as 60 per cent, allowing for under-counting and defining as urban the growing shack accretions around South Africa's formal cities and similar so-called 'closer settlements' in the homelands. In any event, the present level of urbanization in South Africa is well below what is typical for advanced industrial nations, such as those of western Europe, a fact that can be attributed almost entirely to the relatively low figure for Africans irrespective of how 'urban' is defined.

### *The cities*

In the conventional terms of urban geography, South Africa's cities conform to a fairly simple hierarchy. At the top is the Pretoria-Witwatersrand-Vereeniging metropolitan region (usually abbreviated to PWV), covering the country's economic heartland in the southern Transvaal (see [Fig. 1](#)). Within this loose but increasingly integrated conurbation, the Witwatersrand centred on Johannesburg accounted for somewhat over 4.0 million people in 1985, greater Pretoria for about 2.5 million, and the southern section comprising Vereeniging and its neighbours over 600,000 (most of the population figures here are derived from the Urban Foundation, 1990). In the PWV as a whole, there were some 635,000 informal dwellings accommodating over 2.5 million people in 1989—rather more than in the formal Black townships of which Soweto adjoining the city of Johannesburg is by far the largest.

The next level in the hierarchy is occupied by the Durban metropolis with about 2.6 million people in 1985, and by metropolitan Cape Town with 2.25 million. The inclusion of rapidly growing shack settlements across the border in the KwaZulu homeland would make Durban's figure

much higher, however; recent estimates put the shack population in the wider metropolitan region as 1.7 to 2.0 million, perhaps half the total number living there. There are also areas of rapid growth on the eastern edge of the Cape Town metropolis, the large informal component making precise population counts almost as hard as for Durban.

The third level of cities comprises Port Elizabeth (816,000 in 1985), Bloemfontein (525,000), Pietermaritzburg (425,000), the Orange Free State Goldfields (395,000) and East London (380,000). Port Elizabeth in particular has experienced spectacular recent growth, much of it informal, resembling Durban on a smaller scale. Also in this size category is the informal settlement of Botshabelo in a detached bit of the Bophuthatswana homeland to the east of Bloemfontein; some estimates put the population of Botshabelo at close to 0.5 million, not much short of that of Bloemfontein itself. The urban hierarchy is completed by a fourth rung of smaller cities and towns.

The administrative structure of South Africa's cities reveals a complexity befitting the divided society of apartheid. White areas function as local government authorities similar to those in Britain and the United States, for example. Coloured and Asian areas have some degree of local autonomy, with their own elected representatives, though turnout at elections is so poor as to give this form of local government little popular support. Black local authorities with some responsibility for the townships have less autonomy, and even less legitimacy. The informal settlements combine some elements of formal government with other means of administration ranging from democratic local control to brutal coercion.

Urban local government represents one of three tiers of administration in South Africa, those above being provincial (the Cape, Natal, Transvaal and Orange Free State) and national. Since the introduction of a new constitution in 1984, with the whites-only parliament replaced by three separate houses (the House of Assembly for whites, House of Representatives for coloureds and House of Delegates for Asians), there has been an explicit distinction in government between what are regarded as the 'own affairs' of one race group and the 'general affairs' held to affect all groups. Local authorities deal essentially with the 'own affairs' of the race group in question, but Regional Services Councils set up in the latter part of the 1980s are able to exercise some functions over entire metropolitan areas. The conspicuous omission in the so-called 'tricameral' national parliament is, of course, the Black/African population, resolution of which is central to negotiations over the country's political future. The virtual coincidence of race, residential area and local government within the cities is a major obstacle to non-racial representation and administration more generally.

*The future*

While it may be tempting to explain the demise of apartheid in terms of such forces as internal struggle and external sanctions, the contradictions built into the system itself must bear major responsibility. The attempt to take advantage of (cheap) Black labour without conceding the franchise and other commonly accepted rights of citizenship foundered on the fact that labour, unlike other commodities, has a human embodiment that cannot for long be denied. Exploitation was transparent, and moral indignation if not revolt inevitable. But more practically, the vision of a white heartland into which African workers were drawn from their peripheral reserves on a purely temporary basis was patently unsustainable. By the time the government was ready to concede and in part plan for a large and permanent African presence in the cities, it had been overtaken by events. An economy never seriously tempted by incentives to decentralize to the homelands or 'border areas' needed a local and settled workforce, and this coincided with the wishes of the workers themselves. A largely spontaneous reorganization of South Africa's spatial structure centred on the major metropolitan nodes was already under way well before the government proclaimed its policy of 'orderly urbanization', although there had been strong hints of a change in official thinking on regional development strategy at the beginning of the 1980s (for discussion, see Tomlinson and Addleson 1987; Tomlinson 1990). The emerging 'deconcentrated' urban regional structure in effect transfers part of the old rural labour reserve to the growing peri-urban shack settlements on the outer metropolitan periphery.

But it is not only a changing spatial form with which the authorities have to come to terms. The pace of urbanization along with the anticipated size of the cities of the future is generating a crisis, in the sense of serious doubts as to the capacity of the state to manage the process, even without the apartheid distractions of keeping Black people in their place. At the heart of the problem is the 'time bomb' of Black population growth, fuelled by a widening gap between continuing high birth rates and falling death rates. This situation is characteristic of societies during the period of 'demographic transition', which is supposed to end in falling birth rates leading to the roughly zero population growth experienced by advanced industrial societies. Current estimates suggest that it could take South Africa 30 years to reach this population balance.

Herein lies possibly the most serious problem facing the new South Africa. The more rapid the process of economic development and associated sociocultural change usually referred to as 'modernization', including voluntary reduction in family size, the shorter the demographic transition and the sooner population will be held to levels which the economy can sustain with some semblance of decent living standards. But

this very process entails accelerated urbanization, initially at the currently high levels of natural population growth, and under conditions of primitive accommodation and even worse services for most of the people involved.

Research undertaken by the Urban Foundation (1990) provides the most authoritative numerical predictions. The population of South Africa as originally constituted (including the independent homelands), enumerated at 33.1 million in 1985, is expected to reach 47.6 million by the year 2000 and 59.7 million by 2010—not much short of twice what it is today. Whereas the white population will have risen from 4.9 to 5.8 million between 1985 and 2010, the coloureds from 3.0 to 4.2 million and the Asians from 0.9 to 1.2 million, the number of Blacks/Africans will have virtually doubled—from 24.5 to 48.5 million. South Africa's population is thus destined to become increasingly Black, and youthful, and insofar as its growth continues to outstrip that of the economy, it will be increasingly poor.

Classical apartheid at the national scale sought to externalize African population growth, surplus to what the economy could absorb, by confining it to the peripheral homeland reserves. This arrangement has now collapsed, with respect to the power of the state to enforce it as well as to the capacity of the homelands to support continuing population increase. Poor people are making their own cities, not necessarily in conditions of their own choosing but increasingly defying the ability of the state to mould them to its own order. The inevitable consequence is a massive shift of (African) population from rural to metropolitan areas.

Following the Urban Foundation (1990) again, it is predicted that the urban African population of 13 million (53 per cent of their total) in 1985 will have risen to over 33 million (69 per cent) by the year 2010. The metropolitan areas, including their extensions across the increasingly irrelevant homeland borders, contained 8.7 million Africans in 1985; the figure for 2010 is expected to be 23.6 million. Over the same quarter of a century the African population of other urban areas in South Africa, excluding the homelands, is predicted to rise from 1.6 to 3.3 million, with other homeland urban areas registering an increase from 2.7 to 6.3 million.

The impact on individual metropolitan areas will be spectacular. The PWV will have a population of 12.3 million by the turn of the century and 16.5 million by 2010—similar to New York and S o Paulo today (Urban Foundation 1990). Durban will have some 4.4 million people by the year 2000, and 6 million by 2010. Cape Town will grow to 3.3 million by 2000 and 4 million by 2010. In the next tier of the urban hierarchy, Port Elizabeth is predicted to reach 1.9 million by 2010, and the other cities should double in size. In all cases, Africans will substantially increase their share of the total metropolitan or city population. Most of them will be poor, many incapable of affording anything at all for shelter other than what they construct for themselves.

Against these predictions, the legacy of urban apartheid, in the form of residential segregation, buffer zones between races, peripheralization of the black population and long dislocation between residence and workplace, may appear largely irrelevant. But the kind of cities constructed or reconstructed under apartheid themselves constrain the capacity of any government, present or future, to respond to the rising tide of urbanization and especially to the needs of the poor. Indeed, the very practice of urban planning and state housing provision in South Africa is itself so tainted by apartheid as to require considerable effort to regain popular confidence among those whose actual experience is of community destruction and forced relocation. In the mean time, people will find their own solutions to the daunting challenges of day-to-day living, seeking this generation's survival while perhaps unconsciously compounding the problems facing those to come.

### *The book and its content*

The content of this book has been chosen to exemplify and illuminate various issues concerning the past, present and future of the South African city. To be comprehensive is impossible: the intention is to combine a reasonable breadth of treatment with the inclusion of topics of particular interest. The structure and ordering of content requires only brief explanation here. The book is divided into five parts, or groups of chapters on related issues. **Part One** comprises an historical overview of urbanization in South Africa, and a review of the changing context of urban and regional government. **Part Two** brings together pieces on various aspects of housing and community, as imposed, struggled over and reconstructed under apartheid. **Part Three** provides case studies of informal settlement. **Part Four** looks at the servicing of cities, including the informal economy, travel, tourism and health care. **Part Five** turns to the post-apartheid city, considering some of its challenges (or problems) and precedents from which the prospect for change might be judged. There is a brief editorial conclusion.

While each chapter can be read on its own as a contribution to understanding the South African city, together and in sequence they should help to underline the continuity and contradictions built into urban life, and above all its spatiality. Apartheid required the imposition of its own spatial order on human settlement, the pre-existing structure of which could be modified, with considerable expense and human suffering, but never made entirely subservient to the purpose of the state. New spatial forms became the locus of struggle, as black people sought control over their immediate environment even if denied broader political participation. The informal process of settlement, with people explicitly denying their allotted place, contributed significantly to the erosion of the apartheid urban order.

Now the apartheid city, and the challenges to it created within the constraints of apartheid society, impose their own problems and limitations on the formation of a post-apartheid city. Apartheid may have been overcome, but the struggle for liberation from its legacy has barely started.

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# PART ONE

## Background

The first two chapters provide broad overviews, to act as background for those in subsequent parts of the book.

In the first essay ([Chapter 1](#)), Mabin sets urbanization in South Africa in its historical context. He links population movement to the towns and cities to a long-standing practice on the part of African people to seek employment away from their traditional tribal reserves, often oscillating between rural and urban residence. Added to this have been various state and private strategies of dispossession, which have forced Africans off their land. Individual households have often deliberately separated, to maintain both a rural and an urban base for securing the means of subsistence, inextricably binding the one to the other. As new forms of urbanization arise from the impossibility of maintaining a rigid separation between town or city and country, core and periphery, most obviously in the expansion of peri-urban informal settlements, the meaning of ‘urban’ in South Africa continues to challenge conventional interpretations.

McCarthy ([Chapter 2](#)) addresses the issue of urban and regional government, central to the control of urbanization. He argues that these levels of administration tend to have been neglected in the literature, in favour of an interpretation of apartheid which stresses the role of the central state. His emphasis on sub-national processes echoes Mabin’s argument concerning the role of local popular resistance to central government. The contradictions built into classical apartheid have required new spatial structures of control, some of which will carry over into the post-apartheid state in the management of metropolitan regions.



*Dispossession, exploitation and struggle: an  
historical overview of South African  
urbanization*

ALAN MABIN

The tendency for urban scholars to dismiss South African urbanization as an aberration has a strong following. To most casual observers, apartheid shaped the country's peculiar forms of urbanism. Its uniqueness arises from the result of the mapping of white political power onto the country. This standard view contains considerable dangers. Politically, the result is to emphasize ideology and the state (at the expense of economics and daily life) as the primary spheres of struggle against the oppressive order. Intellectually, the consequences include an aversion to probing the real material conditions and social character of urbanization.

This chapter seeks to place material issues at the core of a view of South African urbanization<sup>1</sup> over more than a century. It makes no claim to being definitive; but it does hope to provide a coherent account which can inform understanding of the dynamics of contemporary urban processes in the country, and thus, debates over their future.

*The origins of urban South Africa*

Legal slavery ended in the Cape Colony with the British imperial emancipation of 1834. Until that time such towns as existed in southern Africa were few and tiny; the largest concentrated, non-rural settlements probably consisted of the enormous residential 'villages' of Tswana chiefdoms and perhaps the large capitals of the Zulu kingdom. But both were devoid of the commercial and financial institutions which grew rapidly in colonial ports such as Cape Town and Port Elizabeth and country towns like Graaff-Reinet and Beaufort West from the 1830s onwards (Mabin 1984). Such institutions were replicated in Boer centres like Potchefstroom from the 1840s (Christopher 1976). Rapidly expanding exports of staple products —wine to begin with, then wool—fuelled the

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<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of the chapter, 'urbanization' as a process is understood primarily as population movement towards densely populated and mainly non-agricultural settlements.

growth of trading centres. White expansion into more remote reaches of the interior brought conflict with established polities. For the African communities already settled in these areas and subjected to colonial and Boer expansion, the results generally meant anything from declining independence of the chiefdoms to forced labour for white settlers. The pressures of land loss, military exigency and a growing commercialization of exchange relationships rendered both individuals and whole communities susceptible to involvement in the growing wage-labour economy of the towns by the 1850s.

Urban—rural migration on any scale is often taken to have begun in South Africa with conscious attempts on the part of white colonial and Boer republican authorities to extract labour for farms and mines late in the nineteenth century. However, recent historiography shows that rural people in South Africa have engaged in substantial migration to non-rural activities and places for well over a century (Delius 1980; Harries 1980). A generation or more before colonial authorities achieved direct military, political and economic control over the Pedi, Zulu, Mpondo, Ndebele and Venda, Africans began in growing numbers to join others who found themselves pressured to seek wage work on docks, in railway works, at warehouses and in the small manufacturing enterprises of the towns.

From the 1850s onwards, a number of economic changes wrought a revolution in the urban pattern. An influx of foreign investment occurred, a massive expansion of economic activity began, and a new export—diamonds—rapidly grew to the status of the leading staple, surpassing wool by the late 1870s. By then not only the town most closely associated with diamonds, Kimberley, but also the ports, transport points in between, and agricultural-commercial centres supplying produce to Kimberley had begun to change both in size and character more rapidly than before. To the opportunity for pressured rural communities to tap into a small urban economy which the towns had provided prior to the 1870s was added a new phenomenon: aggressive recruiting for mining, construction and other urban activities (Jeeves 1985).

Thus, in rural-to-urban migration up to 1880, the period which migrants spent at urban destinations varied greatly, ranging from very short to lifetime terms. This variety has persisted to the present day, and encouraged Simkins (1983) to deny the usefulness of the simplistic permanent-versus-temporary distinction. Equally, household or family participation in such migration has also varied, involving parties from individuals to whole extended families (Murray 1987a). The vital point is that entire households have frequently not migrated as a whole, and while a base has been maintained by some members in rural (more recently simply non-formally-urban) areas, other household members have moved to town for longer or shorter periods. This simple fact meant that the reproduction of the workforce did not take place completely within urban

(including mining) environments, making urban areas to some extent dependent on the reproductive functions of rural areas. In summary, from mid nineteenth century onwards a part of the African population always lived in essentially urban households which by varied means provided for their own reproduction in that environment. Many urban households, however, combined resources from both urban and rural activities (Martin and Beittel 1987).

### *The corporate economy and urbanization*

If the changes wrought in South African society prior to 1880 were substantial, they seem dwarfed by the revolution which private companies initiated during the decade of the 1880s. Hastened by speculative collapse and severe depression, diamond mining companies centralized and merged so rapidly that De Beers Consolidated Mines monopolized the industry by 1889. Corporate endeavour moved on to open the gold-fields of the Transvaal: first at Barberton and then on the Witwatersrand in the latter half of the decade. The scale and pace of foreign investment, of technological change, of infrastructural development and of urban growth went far beyond anything previously experienced.

Furthermore, this economic expansion took place under governments with rapidly increasing capacity to rule their territories effectively. Not a single part of rural South Africa reached the turn of the present century with a substantial body of people able to escape the pressures of incorporation into a rapidly growing capitalist economy. Most were deprived of independent control of what they saw as their land, and most rural households henceforth found it difficult to avoid participation in the urban economy through selling the labour of one or more of their members in the towns or mines.

Nevertheless, and importantly, most South African households remained based in rural areas, in actual occupation if not legal possession of some piece of land. This particular combination of powerlessness and possession of land strengthened a circular system of migration which gained support and eventually enforcement from large companies and the state.

### *Rural dispossession and urbanization*

The South African War of 1899–1902, resulting in the defeat of the Boer republics and their annexation to Britain, opened the path to constructing a still more effective state. The government of the Union of South Africa, with its racist constitution providing for an almost exclusively white vote, took control of its million-square-kilometre territory in 1910. Among its explicit intentions was to give effect to the recommendations of the inter-colonial Native Affairs Commission report of 1904. In coordinating ‘native

policy', the corner-stone was to be a land policy. The policy arrived at, although not fully legislated (let alone implemented) until the late 1930s, had the long-term effect of further entrenching the circular migration system.

Prior to union, all four colonies which came together in 1910 had some division of land between Africans and other inhabitants. Areas of greatly varied size, mostly small, had been retained or set aside as 'reserves', within which only African people could live. The intention of the 1913 Land Act was in part to continue a process of adding land to the reserves which the Native Affairs Commission had begun. For most of the period since 1913, outside (as well as at some places inside) the reserves, much of the African population occupied land as tenants or squatters. On farms outside the reserves, some labour went to production on the farm of residence, sometimes allocated by the household itself under sharecropping or rental arrangements. The subjection of labour to control by the landowner or manager was the focus of intense struggle throughout rural South Africa, particularly in the 1920s (Bradford 1987).

Whatever the pattern of resistance, however, 'farmers' assisted by the state increasingly determined part of the labour allocation of rural households through labour tenancy or wage relationships (Van der Horst 1943). Decreasing ability to cultivate crops and run cattle on most non-reserve farms of residence encouraged households to attempt to export labour to other markets, with the result that the numbers of migrant workers originating from rural areas other than the reserves grew rapidly. According to estimates by Nattrass (1981), even in 1970 the number of migrant workers with homes in white-owned rural areas working in the non-agricultural parts of the economy exceeded 400,000—and prior to that date, the numbers may have been even larger. The idea that the *reserves* supported the remainder of the economy through assumption of reproduction functions would, if not already dubious, receive a serious blow from the admission of the fact that rural, non-reserve households supplied a large proportion of migrant labour to urban areas throughout the twentieth century, and especially from the 1930s to the 1960s.

Evictions from private farms and a variety of measures adopted in the reserves, including the replanning of agricultural communities known as 'betterment', had the effect of creating a large landless population by the time the National Party government of D.F. Malan came to power in 1948. In many reserve areas, 'miserable', 'bleak and bare' settlements of the landless began to develop (Walker 1948), from which, inevitably, most households had to send members to participate in the urban economy. During the 1950s the pace of rural eviction began to increase, and it accelerated greatly in the 1960s and 1970s, until literally millions of people had directly experienced eviction from land on which, in most cases,

their family histories were much longer than those of the titular owners (Platzky and Walker 1985).

It should not be assumed that these evictions affected Africans alone. Many thousands of coloured and Indian households also experienced eviction as did some whites. The effect on the urban population was, of course, profound. By the start of the Second World War two-thirds of Indians and whites were living in urban areas, half of coloureds, but only a fifth of Africans (Cilliers and Groenewald 1982).

From the 1930s, informal settlement on the fringes of the cities and many towns began to become common. In 1938, the central state's Ministry of Health initiated an enquiry into 'areas which are becoming urbanised' but which fell outside local authority boundaries. Its main report was completed only in 1941, by which time the exigencies of the war economy precluded much action being taken. Despite the amount of deliberation which the Smuts (United Party) government gave to urban issues in a spirit of reconstruction at the end of the war, the state took few positive actions, while overcrowding and informal residence developed apace. In some respects apartheid was a (racist) response to previous failure to develop coherent urbanization policy.

### *The apartheid era*

Inadequate urbanization policy threatened the system of municipally-controlled passes which had been instituted from 1923 onwards under the Natives (Urban Areas) Act. Yet little housing of any kind was constructed during the war years, so that overcrowding in existing areas, especially in the African 'locations', reached extreme levels by 1945. The result was a series of land invasions and the development of other forms of informal urbanization (Bonner 1990), a situation which the National Party promised to attend to in its manifesto of 1948. Once in government it did so through a series of measures which strengthened the pass system and the police force, while at the same time it adopted policies which channelled the expanding landless population into both non-agricultural settlements in the reserves and into urban townships. In many cases, of course, the same households divided themselves between one or more rural bases and some form of access to shelter in the urban townships.

Especially after 1960, both the possibility and the utility of remaining on farms outside the reserves declined more precipitously, though with considerable spatial variation. Though eviction and relocation to the reserves were central, the reasons for this massive relative and absolute population shift were, and continue to be, by no means simple. Most accounts have stressed an ideologically-based role of the apartheid state (Baldwin 1975; Platzky and Walker 1985; Unterhalter 1987). But changes in the character of agricultural production yielded pressures towards

evictions of tenants and other resident labour. Thus the 1960s became the decade of massive but not necessarily state-sponsored removals of labour tenants and squatters—‘removals of a quiet kind’ (Donald 1984) which continue today.

In the bantustans, increasing numbers of households had little or no involvement in agriculture under their own aegis and growing dependence on wages from members finding work in towns or industries. The obvious question, then, is why these rural but largely non-agricultural households established and maintained bases in the reserves and did not move completely to towns. The answer may be more elusive than a purely state-centred analysis would suggest and has changed substantially over time.

In the first instance, many ex-farm households (or some of their members) probably did move more or less directly to the towns, though more so in the 1950s than the 1960s. In so doing households followed individuals who had already migrated to seek work. Considerable housing construction in new townships from Daveyton and Soweto to Guguletu and Zwile made it possible for such people to find shelter, even though that new housing also had to absorb many forcibly relocated (for example, from the old locations) under the increasingly strict urban segregation practices of the era. But in the townships, two further aspects of the new regime of apartheid gradually made life more difficult. The passage of control over urbanward movement out of the hands of local authorities and into the hands of the central state was one; the erection of the labour bureau system was the other (Hindson 1985).

By the 1960s, then, a system existed which, at least for a time, ‘provided for the legitimate labour requirements of employers’ (Posel 1989) while allocating massive forced migration off the farms in a cold blooded manner to closer settlements of various kinds in the reserves. In 1960 the closer settlements were more or less non-existent: by 1980 they contained, according to Simkins’s (1983) probably low estimate, 3.7 million people. One effect of this massive population growth was to strain beyond any capability the meagre resources of the new (but rapidly growing) bantustan administrations of the era: the results included desperate conditions such as extreme infant mortality rates. These peculiar features of the landscape prompted the view prevalent in the literature that specific and conscious state actions underpinned by an ideology called apartheid ‘contained’ African urbanization—or, in later views, ‘displaced’ that urbanization (Fair and Schmidt 1974; Letsoalo 1983; Murray 1987b).

During the 1960s this system maintained its stability partly through growth of the characteristic ‘townships’ of urban South Africa—where local authorities built much of the housing, or, just across bantustan boundaries, the Bantu Trust as well as neighbouring white local authorities did the same. Little collective resistance to the system crystallized: low rents ruled, political organization remained repressed; residents commuted oppressively

long but practically manageable distances to work on heavily subsidized buses and trains and, at a relatively slow pace, township housing grew overcrowded through subletting rooms. After 1969, most new housing construction in areas open to Africans took place in bantustans. But those new houses could not compensate for the loss of new construction in the urban townships, thereby generating a rapid increase in subletting with the unsurprising result of extreme overcrowding.

*Internal problems of apartheid urbanization*

In the 1970s a number of changes disrupted the apparent stability. Thus the massive strike actions of 1973–4 over low wages might be interpreted as addressing the mounting problems of adequate reproduction for urban dwellers, ‘migrant’ or not, without a substantial rural (re)productive base. Increasing bantustan populations delivered large numbers to the job queues at the rural labour bureaux, while the rate of job creation and labour requisitions slowed. With a great increase in domestic (and corresponding decline in foreign) recruitment of mine labour, many ex-farm residents found themselves forced to join the hard core of migrant labour in the mines. As labour demand stagnated in the later 1970s, rural labour bureaux ceased to have any substantial recruiting function at all, to the point where ‘for many blacks in the rural area there is no labour market’ (Greenberg and Giliomee 1985). For sheer survival, supposedly ‘rural’ households, huge numbers of which had no prospect of supporting themselves solely through rural activities, had to find access to urban economies.

The state’s refusal to build houses in sufficient numbers to meet needs and its exclusion of ‘illegals’ from official tenantry in formal townships forced people to build for themselves; the poverty of the great majority meant that the results are often massively inadequate. The overcrowding of township houses and the growth of shack populations in back yards and on open spaces in and around formal townships demonstrated some of the results.

In short, booms in the recruitment of domestic migrant workers for the mines and construction of houses in the often remote bantustans could not shore up a crumbling regime of population management. That regime had produced numerous bureaucratic problems and material difficulties for urban as well as rural people. It had also coexisted with the development of the quite unintended consequence of massive ‘informal’ population concentrations. Recognizing that its policies were in disarray, the government appointed numerous commissions of enquiry; but the pace of urban change eclipsed recommendations such as those of the Riekert Commission (Hindson 1985).

Struggling to survive and gain greater access to the accumulations of wealth represented by the cities, African people all over South Africa, by individual and collective actions, began to remake the nature of urbanism in the country. That struggle assumed obvious and intense forms first in the Western Cape, where African households with little or no base in the bantustans sought most vigorously to create urban space for themselves as intact units—and met with both victories and defeats. Modderdam and Unibel both disappeared under state bulldozers in 1977–78. But Crossroads survived, grew, and developed a defiant and uncontrolled culture which challenged the bases of an earlier urban regime. It did so at exactly the time at which state officials had to face both their inability to impose full control on the urban population, and the new, unapproved, unintended concentration of population in unserviced areas.

Townships within bantustan boundaries already fringed towns and cities closer to bantustans. For example, 25 to 30 km north-west of Pretoria, Ga-Rankuwa and Mabopane lay just inside Bophuthatswana. Unlike Cape Town, where church land provided the nucleus of eviction-free squatting, privately-owned small land holdings on the Bophuthatswana side of the townships offered sites on which to live at low rentals. In this area, the Winterveld, population rapidly grew to some hundreds of thousands. Around Durban, similar development took place not only inside bantustans; just as in the Western Cape, privately-held and church-owned non-reserve land became more densely settled by Africans, as the examples of Inanda and St Wendolins show. Even around the Witwatersrand, squatting developed rapidly in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Many of those attempting to create an urban life in these strictly illegal and unapproved circumstances faced defeat at the hands of the state as well as private landowners; eviction and relocation has been common. Persistence has been rewarded for some who have struggled to create new communities, though many have found themselves accepting relocation to distant 'approved squatting' sites. Even further away, just within daily reach of Pretoria and even the Witwatersrand, KwaNdebele grew from almost no population to enormous size from the later 1970s (Murray 1987b). In some parts of the country, a large proportion of the 'rural slum' population lives at such distances from the metropolitan centres that the implication of peripherality has to be extended greatly.

South Africa's informal settlements vary greatly in their setting, population size, density, social stratification, levels of wealth and poverty and social organization, political division and conflict. People come to live in such settlements for a variety of reasons. Fundamental to their motives is usually the question of finding places to live. Thus, ex-farm residents do not simply live where they were dumped by private or public evictors. Some went from village to village. Those who have had experience of forced removal, such as eviction from farms, have frequently tried to find



agricultural land on which to settle; but after several attempts, there is a strong tendency to abandon the search and to accept the relative security available in resettlement areas or on residential sites allocated through tribal authorities (Mabin 1989). It is the need to find a place to live under severely constrained circumstances which has led to the growth of a new form of urbanism. Those constraints are experienced by most of the residents of the non-formal settlements more as material than state-authority constraints; but the factors giving rise to the new forms of urbanism—of ‘urbanization’—in South Africa have roots in a complex history of state policy, of household organization of labour and of struggles to create and sustain communities.

Not content to wait for the millennium, the inhabitants of the bantustans and evictees from the farms built new informal ‘urban’ environments which gave them as much access to the benefits of an urban life as they could achieve. Places to live, some security, access to varying levels of participation in the real urban economy, lower costs of living than encountered either in formal urban environments or in remote bantustan districts: these achievements have redrawn the map of population distribution, and greatly affect the political landscape. For a (small) class of informal settlement entrepreneurs (in one view) or exploiters (in another) they provide the base for substantial accumulation of wealth. But the majority of their residents have not yet been able to challenge the central controls over their lives—propertylessness and state power. The prospects for them to do so seem bleak at present. One factor militating against the people’s hopes lies in the violent conflicts which have tragically characterized so many informal settlements since the mid 1980s.

*Renewed apartheid? Land invasion and state land  
allocation*

In some townships, community organizations have responded to the pressing demand for relief of oppressive material conditions by fostering invasions of open land. Civic associations in places as diverse as Mangaung (Bloemfontein) and Wattville (Benoni, east Witwatersrand) have planned and executed land invasions in which members of the township communities concerned have taken over land adjacent to the townships, and erected settlements. Through a variety of tactics they have encouraged authorities such as local white town councils, development agencies such as the Urban Foundation and branches of the state such as provincial administrations to negotiate on their security, and even more significantly, on the provision of basic services to these new urban communities (Mabin and Klein 1991).

But these movements are not without their problems. Amongst other things, they tend to reinforce the broad apartheid geography of the cities

rather than to fundamentally challenge it. By establishing themselves next to the large townships created in the 1950s, the land invaders reinforce the pattern, created under Prime Minister Verwoerd in the 1950s, of peripheral, segregated African residential areas.

State planners have also engaged vigorously in the allocation of large tracts of land for legalized informal residence since the mid-1980s. Using the provisions of Section 6A of the amended Prevention of Illegal Squatting Act, minimally serviced areas have been opened to settlement in the hinterlands of the established townships. Orange Farm in the area between Soweto and Sebokeng, Motherwell across the Zwartkops river from the sprawling Port Elizabeth townships and parts of Khayelitsha on the Cape Flats provide well-known illustrations. Apartheid in this sense of the broad allocation of segregated, remote land to black urban residents is very much alive, though it is continuously challenged by squatters who occupy land far from the approved townships. Through the actions of squatters, support groups and even officials in places such as Hout Bay and Noordhoek in the Cape, Midrand in the Transvaal and a few instances in Natal, there are prospects that the apartheid land allocation pattern may at last begin to break down.

In these new African communities, the overwhelming majority of residents would appear to come from existing townships rather than directly from rural areas. It is common cause that most population growth in South African urban communities is supplied internally. Indeed, the peak era of African migration from rural areas to the cities, which probably began in the late 1970s, seems to have subsided by the time influx control was abolished in 1986.

### *Conclusion*

A survey of the history of South African urbanization, such as that outlined in this chapter, must provide a reminder of the extent to which the processes involved consist of dispossession and exploitation. Indeed, rural dispossession lies behind almost every form of urbanization. In South Africa, where dispossession is recent and even continues in obvious and sometimes bloody ways, discussion of urbanization and appropriate policy is increasingly conducted within opulent venues and between glossy covers, as though such tactics would deprive the urban poor of their collective memory of these active processes of underdevelopment. Of course such is not the case, though the struggles which the 'urbanizers' have waged against dispossession and exploitation have a terrible tendency, in the almost unliveable urban environments of late apartheid, to mutate into internecine conflict in which the poor find themselves pitted against each other—with renewed consequences of dispossession and exploitation.