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Explaining the Apartheid City: 20 Years of South African Urban Historiography

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The theme of urban segregation/apartheid has generated a considerable body of scholarly writing in the past 20 years. This urban research has been highly interdisciplinary, mainly involving geographers and historians and has tended to be afrocentric in focus. Numerous case studies have been produced, but few works that have synthesised or theorised. Much attention has been given to the process of urban segregation, as scholars have traced its origins and tried to explain the imperatives and mechanisms that governed the process. The overall picture to emerge shows urban segregation evolving over a long period of time in a rather haphazard, piecemeal way. The continuities before and after both the 1923 Natives (Urban Areas) Act and the 1950 Group Areas Act are more striking than the discontinuities. South African urban historical research has also provided a clearer understanding of such themes as housing policy, urban 'native administration' and influx control, but has generally not succeeded in elucidating the central – local state relationship in the making of urban policy. South African urban historiography has also been influenced by the recent trend away from materialist analysis. While the abandonment of reductionism and mechanistic explanations is welcomed, this article stresses the importance of material forces in the making of urban segregation and apartheid.

Twenty years ago South African urban historiography was in its infancy. Few scholars had engaged in any critical historical analysis of urbanisation, urban policy or the urban experience. When David Welsh wrote his chapter, 'The Growth of Towns', for the *Oxford History of South Africa*¹ he could draw on little secondary material that would ease the task of synthesis and overview. From the 1960s there were two pioneer historians venturing into the urban field. Bill Swanson's Harvard doctoral thesis examined African urbanisation in Durban² and Rodney Davenport was producing a set of articles on the legislative evolution of urban segregation.³ Otherwise, most of the more probing urban studies had been written by anthropologists.⁴ In 1974, at the beginning of this 20 year survey, there did appear a suggestive article by John Rex, exploring the spatial dimension of state control over the black underclasses⁵ – a theme which came to be widely developed over the next two decades.

1 D. Welsh, 'The Growth of Towns', in M. Wilson and L. Thompson (eds) *The Oxford History of South Africa* (Oxford, 1971), ii, pp. 172–244.

2 M. W. Swanson, 'The Rise of Multiracial Durban: Urban History and Race Policy in South Africa, 1830–1930' unpublished Ph.D thesis, Harvard University, 1964.

3 T. R. H. Davenport, 'African townsmen? South African (Natives) Urban Areas Legislation Through the Years', *African Affairs*, 68 (1969); 'The triumph of Colonel Stallard', *South African Historical Journal*, 2 (1970); *The Beginnings of Urban Segregation in South Africa* (Grahamstown, 1971).

4 See, for instance, P. Mayer, *Townsmen or Tribesmen* (Cape Town, 1963); B. A. Pauw, *The Second Generation* (Cape Town, 1963).

5 J. Rex, 'The Compound, the Reserve and the Urban Location: the Essential Institutions of Southern African Labour Exploitation', *South African Labour Bulletin*, 1, 4 (1974).

In the past 15 years or so there has been an outpouring of work in South African urban history. Conferences and workshops have been held on the history of specific cities.⁶ The University of Cape Town history department has, since 1984, produced an in-house journal, *Studies in the History of Cape Town*, which has run to seven volumes. Such has been the growth in the field that it would now easily be possible to produce a journal of South African urban history (not that I am recommending this). Indeed one feature of this urban research is that so much of it has appeared in article form – or in theses – as the urban case study has become a popular topic for postgraduate research. Given the massive expansion of the field it is perhaps surprising how few books have come out of this urban research.

The terrain of South African urban history has become highly interdisciplinary. Alongside the historians, geographers are the most heavily involved. The subject has also come to straddle anthropology, sociology, town planning, architecture, literary and cultural studies and musicology. Such a high level of interdisciplinarity is hardly surprising. If one wishes to study almost any aspect of modern South African society one can hardly avoid the urban dimension. Gross material inequality – so much a feature of the country – has been most visible in urban areas where extraordinary polarities of wealth and poverty can be seen in close proximity to each other. Cities have been the main sites of popular protest, struggle and resistance. The apartheid order came up against its most fundamental contradictions in urban areas.

Urban history thus inevitably shades into other branches of history: into economic history, as industrialisation and urbanisation are closely interwoven, and into labour history, political history and women's history. So close are the connections that it can become difficult to demarcate the particular terrain of urban history. If one is to insist on such demarcation, then one should draw on the old distinction between 'history-in-the-city' and 'history-of-the-city'. Factory-floor struggles occur in cities and national political campaigns tend to be urban centred, but these generally fall into the 'history-in-the-city' category. Urban historians are more concerned with social movements and popular struggles around community issues which are shaped by the particular urban environment. They are less concerned with issues arising out of work-place conflicts or national political campaigns.

As one would expect there has arisen a number of different approaches to South African urban history. At one extreme there is the antiquarian tradition – anecdotal, eurocentric, celebrating the monuments of colonisation, the tradition of the local historical society. At another pole one comes across work with a more pronounced theoretical content. And it seems that theoretical influences have been stronger in the case of some urban historical geographers than with urban historians. Some South Africanist urban scholars have drawn on the Marxist theoretical work of Castells and Harvey.⁷ More recently Jennifer Robinson has applied some of the ideas of Foucault and Michael Mann to the historical geography of Port Elizabeth.⁸ Deborah Hart is another geographer whose work displays a firm theoretical awareness.⁹ Of the urban work that has been more obviously historical there are some examples of studies that have been explicitly Marxist in approach. One of the best

6 The theme of the first Wits History Workshop in 1978 was the urban history of the Rand. A number of workshops on the history of Cape Town have been held at University of Cape Town during the past 15 years. A workshop on the social history of Durban was held the University of Natal, Durban, in 1983. More recently, in 1992, the history of Port Elizabeth was the theme of a workshop held at the Port Elizabeth campus of Vista University.

7 See, for instance, R. Bloch and P. Wilkinson, 'Urban Control and Popular Struggle: A Survey of State Urban Policy 1920–1970', *Africa Perspective*, 20 (1982); J. McCarthy, 'The Political Economy of Urban Land Use', *South African Geographical Journal*, 65 (1983).

8 J. Robinson, 'The Power of Apartheid: Territoriality and State Power in South African Cities – Port Elizabeth 1923–1972', unpublished Ph.D thesis, Cambridge University, 1990.

9 D. Hart, 'Master Plans: The South African Government's Razing of Sophiatown, Cato Manor and District Six', unpublished Ph.D thesis, Syracuse University, 1990.

examples is David Hemson's doctoral thesis on the Durban dock-workers, written in the 1970s at a time when such an approach had currency. For Hemson the Durban local state was an instrument of capital, and class struggle was the essential dynamic of the city's history.¹⁰ In the past 15 years most South Africanist urban historians have written more or less in what can be loosely called a radical, critical tradition, but generally without slavish or even explicit adherence to Marxist theory.

Some features of this urban historiography stand out. First, it has been largely afrocentric, highlighting the black urban experience and urban policy as it affected black people. Second, it has been heavily metropole based, with most research being focused on the four major industrial centres of Johannesburg, Durban, Cape Town and Port Elizabeth. There is a kind of historiographical underdevelopment here – with the less-industrialised centres and smaller towns being marginalised. But given the location of archives and universities such a trend is hardly surprising. Third, the focus of urban historical writing has been generally narrow. The case-study approach has ruled. We have many studies of particular communities – townships, squatter settlements – and of specific themes and phases, albeit worthwhile studies. But we have few synthesising works that draw together the findings from two decades of research.¹¹ Nor do we yet have a coherent, single-authored, book-length study of any particular South African city over the full span of its history, written in the critical tradition of urban historiography.¹² South African rural history, which has fewer practitioners, has probably done better than urban history in terms of important published books. Twelve years after publication, Charles van Onselen's two-volume book on the first 30 years of Johannesburg's history still remains the finest book to have appeared in the field of South African urban historiography.¹³

Its empirical richness apart, van Onselen's work avoids the limitation of afrocentrism and it handles with great subtlety both larger urban processes and the more specific urban experience, both impersonal structures and human agency. Few other works of urban history have been able to do this. Indeed most South African urban research tends to fall into one of two categories. Into one category one can place the accounts and analyses of urban policy, with a special focus on attempts by the central and local state to exercise control over the black underclasses in urban areas. The second category is that of social history, involving the effort to capture something of the urban experience – the life style, culture and struggles of urban dwellers. Again, in the past 15 years this research has been very largely concerned with the urban experience of the black underclasses. The greater body of published work has fallen into the first category. Certainly most of the writings of historical geographers have been concerned with the making and impact of urban policy. While historians have been the most productive in urban social history, they too have devoted considerable attention to urban policy. In part this may be because the study of urban policy involves more orthodox documentary research in the safety of archives and the

10 D. Hemson, 'Class Consciousness and Migrant Workers: Dock Workers of Durban', unpublished Ph.D thesis, University of Warwick, 1979, pp. 74, 241. A similar approach is adopted in André Proctor, 'Class Struggle, Segregation and the City: A History of Sophiatown, 1905–1940', in B. Bozzoli (ed.), *Labour, Townships, and Protest* (Johannesburg, 1979).

11 Among the attempts at a historiographical overview one can include G. H. Pirie, 'South African Urban history', *Urban History Yearbook* (1985) and C. C. Saunders, *Writing History: South Africa's Urban Past and Other Essays* (Pretoria, 1992).

12 There are, though, edited collections of essays. See, for instance, Bozzoli (ed), *Labour, Townships and Protest*; J. Laband and R. Haswell (eds), *Pietermaritzburg 1838–1988* (Pietermaritzburg, 1988); P. Maylam and I. Edwards (eds), *The People's City: A History of African Life in Durban* (Pietermaritzburg, forthcoming). Historians at UCT are also working on a history of Cape Town.

13 C. van Onselen, *New Babylon and New Nineveh: Studies in the Social and Economic History of the Witwatersrand* (Johannesburg, 1982). Some of the observations made in this introductory section have also been made by C. Saunders, 'District Six and Urban History in South Africa', *South African Historical Journal*, 26 (1992), p. 199.

nature of the subject-matter makes the task of reconstruction and analysis less taxing. For the social historian the source material is not so readily available and the business of recounting 'the urban experience' altogether more elusive.

With an extensive body of literature on the subject now available to us it is worthwhile to reflect in more general terms on how our understanding of South African urban policy has been advanced during the past 15–20 years. Work on urban policy has largely been concerned with one or more of three main questions. First, who shaped urban policy? The central state, the local state, ratepayers or capital? Second, what imperatives determined urban policy? Political domination, social control or capital accumulation? Third, what has been the significance and impact of urban policy? To what extent have its overall objectives been realised?

Urban Segregation: Origins, Imperatives, Mechanisms

The history of South African urban policy has many dimensions, but one aspect of it has preoccupied scholars for many years – urban segregation. The historiography of urban segregation is massive and continues to grow. While numerous case studies of urban segregation have been written, mostly in the past 10–15 years, there has been no real attempt to provide any comparative or synthesising analysis.¹⁴ Urban segregation is a theme that bears on each of the three questions posed above. So it is worthwhile to attempt a review of research findings on the subject. Post-modernists may deplore the quest for origins and the teleology that accompanies it, but scholars have continued to search for the origins of urban segregation in South Africa. Does one trace the modern configuration of segregated townships to the group areas policy of the apartheid era or to the preceding era of segregation? Or does it have more distant colonial origins? In other words, has it been a product of South Africa's own peculiar, bizarre brand of racism or a typical feature of colonialism?

A colonial medieval origin has been suggested by Christopher, who traces segregation back to the early English colonisation of Wales and Ireland: 'It may therefore be argued that the historical foundations of modern Soweto ... were laid by Edward I in his Welsh military foundations in the thirteenth century at Flint, Conway and Caernarvon'.¹⁵ A search for more local, more recent origins takes one to the eastern Cape. Port Elizabeth has been identified, again by Christopher, as 'one of the principal cities where the foundations of ... apartheid ... were laid'.¹⁶ As early as 1834 the London Missionary Society (LMS) established a formal black settlement on the western edge of Port Elizabeth.¹⁷ (Can one therefore pin the origins of urban segregation on the missionaries?). In the 1850s the Port Elizabeth municipality created the Native Strangers' Location 'where Hottentots, Fingoes, Kaffirs and other Strangers visiting Port Elizabeth may temporarily reside' – a colonial expression of the idea, to become dominant for most of the twentieth century, that black people were essentially aliens in urban areas. A 100 years before group areas the Port Elizabeth municipality tried to enforce urban apartheid, issuing regulations in 1855 requiring blacks to live in the Native Strangers' Location if not housed by their employers or owning their own property.¹⁸

14 A. Lemon (ed.), *Homes Apart: South Africa's Segregated Cities* (Cape Town, 1991) – this is more a collection of case studies than a synthesis.

15 A. J. Christopher, 'From Flint to Soweto: Reflections on the Colonial Origins of the Apartheid City', *Area*, 15 (1983), p. 145.

16 A. J. Christopher, 'Port Elizabeth', in Lemon (ed.), *Homes Apart*, p. 43.

17 A. J. Christopher, 'Apartheid Planning in South Africa: The Case of Port Elizabeth', *The Geographical Journal*, 153, 2 (1987), p. 197.

18 *Ibid.*; G. Baines, 'The Origins of Urban Segregation: Local Government and the Residence of Africans in Port Elizabeth, c. 1835–1865', *South African Historical Journal*, 22 (1990), pp. 74–75.

East London runs Port Elizabeth close in laying claim to be a founder of urban segregation. Racial segregation was instituted in East London as early as 1849 when a government notice was issued requiring 'Fingoes and other coloured natives' to live in 'locations'. In 1857 regulations were issued for the control of Africans in the town's 'Native Village'. So East London has been described as being by 1872 'a town with a clear legacy of enforced racial separation'.¹⁹ Other eastern Cape towns – Cradock, Graaff-Reinet, Grahamstown among them – were also adopting urban racial segregation in the mid-nineteenth century. So what of the country's oldest city? Does the suggested eastern Cape origin of urban segregation give credence to the long-held idea of Cape Town being a liberal city, upon which segregation was foisted in the post-1950 group areas era? Certainly the more obvious manifestations of urban segregation – separate 'locations', controls over black residence and movement – were not evident in Cape Town before the twentieth century. As Bickford-Smith has argued, segregation in nineteenth-century Cape Town was more exclusive than divisive – aimed not so much at keeping races apart but more at excluding people of colour from the ranks of the dominant class. He puts it pithily: '... it mattered that the dominant class was white, but it did not, as yet, matter that whites were numbered amongst the lower classes ...'.²⁰

What, too, of the Boer republics – in liberal analysis, an important source of segregation? There is evidence of urban segregationist principles gaining official recognition in the Transvaal and Orange Free State in the last two decades of the nineteenth century. In the 1890s Kruger's government set aside areas of land in Johannesburg for separate Malay and African 'locations'.²¹ In the same decade Free State town councils were empowered to establish segregated locations.²² Any late nineteenth-century movement towards segregation would seem to lend weight to the view that it arose in the context of industrialisation and capitalist development during the mineral revolution. This view has been argued by Mabin, for whom spatial forms developed at Kimberley during the 1880s represent perhaps the most important source of urban segregation in South Africa: 'Compound and hostel were essentially the first rigid form of residential segregation applied in the development of the South African city. Ordered townships were created in the wake of that experience.'²³

In Durban, residential segregation, insofar as it evolved at all before 1900, was mainly directed against Indians. In 1871 the Durban Town Council adopted a policy of creating separate locations for Indians – what Swanson calls 'the first concerted attempt at group area segregation in Durban and one of the first in a major South African town'.²⁴ Although the segregationist intent was very evident, the policy was not implemented for some decades. Before 1900 the Durban local state was more actively engaged in imposing

19 R. Fox, E. Nel and C. Reintges, 'East London', in Lemon (ed.), *Homes Apart*, p. 58; E. L. Nel, 'Racial Segregation in East London, 1836–1948', *South African Geographical Journal*, 73 (1991), pp. 60–61. See also K. Tankard, 'The Development of East London Through Four Decades of Municipal Control 1873–1914', unpublished Ph.D thesis, Rhodes University, 1990, Ch. 10.

20 V. Bickford-Smith, 'A "Special Tradition of Multi-racialism"? Segregation in Cape Town in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries', in W. G. James and M. Simons (eds), *The Angry Divide* (Cape Town, 1989), p. 48; see also V. Bickford-Smith, 'The Background to Apartheid in Cape Town: The Growth of Racism and Segregation from the Mineral Revolution to the 1930's', unpublished Wits History Workshop paper, 1990, p. 6.

21 S. Parnell, 'Sanitation, Segregation and the Natives (Urban Areas) Act: African Exclusion from Johannesburg's Malay Location, 1897–1925', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 17, 3 (1991), p. 273.

22 Davenport, *Beginnings of Urban Segregation*, p. 5.

23 A. Mabin, 'Labour, Capital, Class Struggle and the Origins of Residential Segregation in Kimberley', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 12 (1986), p. 22; see also G. H. Pirie, 'Kimberley', in Lemon (ed.), *Homes Apart*.

24 M. W. Swanson, 'The Asiatic Menace: Creating segregation in Durban, 1870–1900', *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 16 (1983).

controls and restrictions on its black working class than in implementing residential segregation.

More problematic than identifying the origins of urban segregation is explaining the imperatives that brought about this particular spatial form. A survey of the literature suggests approximately a dozen possible motives or reasons. Most explanations tend to fall into one or other of two categories – either stressing social and psychological factors or leaning towards a materialist position. But other explanations are also to be found. Urban segregation in mid-nineteenth century East London, for instance, appears to have been determined by military considerations. East London was at that time no more than a colonial military outpost and the dictates of colonial defence shaped the spatial organisation of the town.²⁵ The drive for political domination and control has been emphasised by others. Robinson tries to demonstrate ‘the significance of the African location as a strategy for building state power’.²⁶ Hart, too, stresses the role of the state in promoting urban segregation in pursuit of political goals, even if it went against the logic of capital accumulation.²⁷

In most case studies of urban segregation in South Africa one comes across references to the ‘sanitation syndrome’. First emphasised by Swanson,²⁸ it explains urban segregation in terms of moral panic and racial hysteria, as whites increasingly came to associate the black urban presence with squalor, disease and crime. For a while, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the ‘sanitation syndrome’ was dismissed by Marxists as a superficial, idealist explanation.²⁹ But more recent work has tended to give due acknowledgement to Swanson’s line of analysis. There is indeed plenty of evidence to indicate a strong connection between, on the one hand, perceived threats to white health and safety and, on the other, the drive to urban segregation. Especially conspicuous is the causal link between epidemics and urban removals. The spread of bubonic plague around South Africa from 1901 to 1904 was always followed by white ratepayer demands for greater racial segregation. The plague first hit Cape Town in 1901. Its popular name, the ‘black death’, was to have unfortunate connotations in South Africa, as the plague came to be associated more with the black urban presence than with the rats that carried it. Within a few weeks of the outbreak some six to seven thousand Africans were removed from central Cape Town to temporary accommodation at Ndabeni.³⁰ It was a similar story in Port Elizabeth where the onset of the plague in 1901 prompted the local authority to demolish inner-city ‘locations’ and build a segregated township that came to be known as New Brighton.³¹ The plague’s arrival in Durban in 1902 aroused white hysteria, seeming to confirm the image of Africans as a public health menace. Calls came for a segregated location and a general ‘cleaning up’ of the town.³² In Johannesburg the outbreak of plague was used by the local authorities to

25 Fox *et al.*, ‘East London’, p. 58; Nel, ‘Racial Segregation in East London’, p. 60.

26 Robinson, ‘Power of Apartheid’, p. 323.

27 Hart, ‘Master Plans’, pp. 267–268.

28 M. W. Swanson, ‘The Sanitation Syndrome: Bubonic Plague and Urban Native Policy in the Cape Colony, 1900–1909’, *Journal of African History*, 18 (1977); M. W. Swanson, ‘“The Durban System”: Roots of Urban Apartheid in Colonial Natal’, *African Studies*, 35 (1976).

29 See, for instance, Hemson, ‘Class Consciousness and Migrant Workers’, pp. 73–74.

30 Swanson, ‘The Sanitation Syndrome’, p. 392; C. C. Saunders, ‘Segregation in Cape Town: The Creation of Ndabeni’, *Africa Seminar: Collected Papers* (University of Cape Town), 1 (1978), p. 47.

31 Swanson, ‘The Sanitation Syndrome’, p. 400; Christopher, ‘Apartheid Planning’, p. 197.

32 Swanson, ‘Durban System’, p. 171; Hemson, ‘Class Consciousness and Migrant Workers’, pp. 102–11; P. la Hausse, ‘The Struggle for the City: Alcohol, the Ematsheni and Popular Culture in Durban, 1902–1936’, unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Cape Town, 1984, p. 29; C. Dyer, ‘A Case of Money and Life: An Examination of the Relationship Between Health and the Political Economy in Durban at the Turn of the Century’, unpublished honours dissertation, University of Natal, Durban, 1986.

justify the removal of people from the inner-city 'Coolie Location' to the new township of Klipspruit.³³

The connection between health concerns and the segregationist imperative goes far beyond the plague outbreak. The influenza epidemic of 1918 had similar consequences. It drew attention to the appalling conditions at Ndabeni, Cape Town's black township built to accommodate those removed during the 1901 plague, and gave rise to the demand that Ndabeni itself be razed and its inhabitants be removed even further out of town.³⁴ The 1918 epidemic also placed the insanitary state of Johannesburg's Malay Location on the agenda.³⁵ Other case studies confirm this link between the 'sanitation syndrome' and urban segregationism.³⁶ The link is also revealed in the reports of successive government health commissions. The 1914 Tuberculosis Commission condemned locations and slums as a health menace. The 1918 Influenza Commission adopted a similar stance. The Department of Health and municipal health officials came to take a special interest in patterns of urban settlement, which was seen very much as a health issue.³⁷ The 1939 Thornton Committee report on uncontrolled peri-urban settlement was commissioned by the Department of Health.

Does all this leave us with an idealist explanation? Was urban segregation simply a matter of alleviating white panic, racist paranoia and squeamishness? Or was the 'sanitation syndrome' merely a pretext for segregation? More probably the latter. It would be a mistake to view the 'sanitation syndrome' as the major imperative towards segregation. It is interesting that even Swanson himself stresses rather the metaphorical significance of the syndrome, suggesting that 'urban race relations came to be widely conceived and dealt with in the imagery of infection and epidemic disease'.³⁸

Material interests appear to have weighed much more heavily in the drive to urban segregation. This is not to say that urban policy was shaped according to capital's dictates, or that the local/central state was the instrument of capital. It is to say that urban segregation did serve, at different times, a variety of material interests. It has been shown, for instance, that one of the earliest segregationist impulses was directed against Indians. This was often couched in the discourse of sanitation and disease, but the underlying source was more often resentment of Indian commercial competition. This was a familiar theme in Natal from the late nineteenth century. Although proposals for a separate Indian location in Durban did not materialise in the 1870s, the 1897 Licensing Act was used by local councils in Natal to withhold trading licenses from Indians.³⁹ Later, in particular from the 1940s, Indians came to be specially targeted for residential segregation in Natal and the Transvaal – and resentment of Indian commercial competition largely explains this segregationist drive. This resentment was also behind moves to segregate Indians in East London in the early twentieth century.⁴⁰

The merchant class was, though, clearly not the prime mover behind urban segregation. Other material interests came into play. At times the demand for segregation has come from white urban property owners. They represented an important constituency. As ratepayers

33 S. M. Parnell and G. H. Pirie, 'Johannesburg', in Lemon (ed.), *Homes Apart*, p. 130.

34 C. C. Saunders, 'From Ndabeni to Langa', *Studies in the History of Cape Town*, 1 (1984), pp. 194–195.

35 Parnell, 'Sanitation, Segregation', p. 278.

36 See, for instance, R. M. Packard, *White Plague, Black Labor* (Los Angeles, 1989), pp. 52–53, 134–135, 194–195; Mabin, 'Labour, Capital, Class Struggle', pp. 20–21; H. Sapire, 'African Settlement and Segregation in Brakpan, 1900–1927', in P. Bonner, I. Hofmeyr, D. James and T. Lodge (eds), *Holding Their Ground* (Johannesburg, 1989), pp. 154–157.

37 Swanson, 'The Sanitation Syndrome', p. 409; see also, S. Parnell, 'Creating Racial Privilege: The Origins of South African Public Health and Town Planning Legislation', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 19 (1993).

38 Parnell, 'Creating Racial Privilege', p. 387.

39 Swanson, 'Asiatic Menace', pp. 404–416.

40 Nel, 'Racial Segregation in East London', pp. 62–63.

they determined the shape of municipal councils, and they acted to secure property values, which seemed to be best safeguarded by distancing black urban residence. There is, from various centres around the country, ample evidence of ratepayers exerting pressure for residential segregation. This was certainly the case in Cape Town, Port Elizabeth, Durban and Johannesburg.⁴¹ There is also the suggestion that in Johannesburg in the first two decades of this century the white working class saw segregation as a means to greater job security. Parnell argues that this constituency, represented by the Labour Party, pressured the Johannesburg City Council to demolish the Malay Location because its African inhabitants were competing with whites for unskilled jobs.⁴²

Any materialist analysis of urban segregation necessarily has to focus on the role of larger capitalist interests in shaping the spatial layout of cities. Residential racial segregation could be in the interests of capital for two main reasons: first, in facilitating labour control and, second, in releasing land for industrial purposes. Segregation as a means of labour control is well attested. This line is argued strongly by Mabin in his study of early Kimberley. He claims that the roots of urban segregation can be traced to Kimberley and that in Kimberley segregation was all about labour control. It is well known that industrial compounds originated in Kimberley and that their obvious purpose was labour control. It is less well known that the further residential segregation of black and white workers in Kimberley was instituted – in the form of a company ‘village’ for whites and ‘locations’ for blacks – during the 1880s in order to divide the working class at a time when labour struggles were manifesting signs of non-racial working-class solidarity. For Mabin urban segregation was thus born in the context of class struggle and was designed, in part at least, to dampen that struggle.⁴³ Parnell extends this argument into the twentieth century by applying it to the ‘poor white’ issue. Following Davies, she views poor whiteism as having been a threat to the South African social formation and therefore also to capitalism. Urban segregation was necessary in order to disunite the working class and maintain the racial division of labour.⁴⁴

Urban segregation and the forced removals that often accompanied the process, could serve capitalist interests by releasing prime land for business activities. Local authorities would also be keen to raise the rateable value of urban land in this way. Thus as cities have industrialised and grown during the twentieth century, so have inner-city pockets of proletarian or lumpenproletarian settlement, tying up land, become more and more of an anathema to local power holders. In Port Elizabeth industry expanded northwards, taking over areas of black settlement.⁴⁵ The hilly terrain of greater Durban placed a high value on the flat land to the south of the city. This entailed the expropriation of property and the large-scale removal of communities, predominantly Indian.⁴⁶ A similar destruction of inner-city black communities occurred in Johannesburg to create space for business development.⁴⁷

41 Bickford-Smith, ‘Special Tradition of Multi-racialism?’ p. 57; B. Kinkad-Weekes, ‘Africans in Cape Town: State Policy and Popular Resistance, 1936–73’, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Cape Town, 1992, pp. 13–20, 109, 219; Baines, ‘Origins of Urban Segregation’, pp. 64, 80; P. Maylam, ‘The Evolution of Urban Apartheid: Influx Control and Segregation in Durban, c. 1900–1951’, in W. Guest and J. M. Sellers (eds), *Receded Tides of Empire* (Pietermaritzburg, 1994), p. 269; Proctor, ‘History of Sophiatown’, p. 56.

42 Parnell, ‘Sanitation, Segregation’, pp. 272–273, 280.

43 Mabin, ‘Labour, Capital, Class Struggle’, pp. 5, 11–13, 21–22; Pirie, ‘Kimberley’, p. 120.

44 Parnell, ‘Creating Racial Privilege’, pp. 473–476.

45 J. Robinson, ‘The Politics of Urban Form: Differential Citizenship and Township Formation in Port Elizabeth 1925–1945’, unpublished paper, 1992, p. 4.

46 D. Scott, ‘The Destruction of Clairwood: A Case Study on the Transformation of Commercial Living Space’, in D. M. Smith (ed.), *The Apartheid City and Beyond* (Johannesburg, 1992), p. 94.

47 See, for instance, S. Parnell, ‘Racial Segregation in Johannesburg: The Slums Act, 1934–39’, *South African Geographical Journal*, 70, 2 (1988), p. 116; Parnell, ‘Sanitation, Segregation’, p. 278.

A review of the urban historiography shows that it is difficult both to pinpoint the origins of urban racial segregation in South Africa and to isolate dominant motives or imperatives. Equally complex has been the process of urban segregation – a number of mechanisms have been employed over the decades to bring about the peculiar race-based spatial organisation of South African cities. One view stresses the significance of the 1950 Group Areas Act as the key measure bringing about urban segregation. But the Group Areas Act was only one of many pieces of legislation enacted over the years and drawn up to push segregation further. Over-emphasis on the Group Areas Act conceals the continuities.

Urban segregation came to be implemented over several decades under a wide range of legislative measures. Moreover, mechanisms other than legislation were used at various times. It has been shown, for instance, that racial restrictions on urban residence were written into title deeds. This was certainly the case in Port Elizabeth and no doubt elsewhere in the first half of the twentieth century – so from about 1900 new suburbs laid out in Port Elizabeth came to be racially segregated.⁴⁸ The Pietermaritzburg City Council had inserted anti-Asiatic clauses in title deeds since 1898.⁴⁹ Departments of state devised other mechanisms for implementing segregation. For instance, the Central Housing Board, set up under the 1920 Housing Act, only approved grants for housing projects that were racially defined. In East London in 1927 a housing scheme for exclusive coloured occupancy was initiated.⁵⁰

Urban historical writing over the last decade has steadily revealed the wide range of laws through which urban segregation could be implemented. While some measures were obviously and directly segregationist, others were more indirect, bringing segregation through the back door – via housing, public health or planning legislation. Among the more overtly segregationist measures one would list the 1923 Natives (Urban Areas) Act and the 1950 Group Areas Act. But one should avoid overestimating the significance of either. The 1923 Act recommended and enabled residential segregation, but did not compel it. Although the 1950 Act had devastating consequences for many communities, segregation was already well advanced in most South African cities by the time that the act was passed.

It is mainly the work of Mabin and Parnell that has drawn our attention to the more indirect forms of segregationist legislation. From the 1910s the discourse of public health, expressed in the 1919 Public Health Act, increasingly viewed disease in racial terms and promoted segregation as one solution to urban health problems – problems that were perceived to arise out of the overcrowded and insanitary living conditions of urban Africans.⁵¹ The 1934 Slums Act was another measure that sought to implement residential segregation under the guise of public health care. The aim of the act was to provide for the removal of black slum communities to create space for white working-class housing schemes and business development. Although little has been written on the country-wide implementation of the act, we do know that it was applied in Johannesburg in the late 1930s, when Bertrams township was ‘cleared’ and a whites-only housing scheme was erected on the emptied land. However, Parnell suggests that slum clearance in Johannesburg from the 1930s was more important in releasing land for business development than in implementing residential segregation.⁵²

It was also from the 1930s that town planning regulations came to reinforce urban

48 Christopher, ‘Apartheid Planning’, p. 199; Christopher, ‘Port Elizabeth’, pp. 45–46.

49 T. M. Wills, ‘Pietermaritzburg’, in Lemon (ed), *Homes Apart*, p. 92.

50 A. Mabin, ‘Origins of Segregatory Urban Planning in South Africa, c. 1900–1940’, *Planning History*, 13, 3 (1991), p. 9; Christopher, ‘Apartheid Planning’, p. 199; E. L. Nel, ‘The Making of Territorial Apartheid: The case of East London’s Locations’, unpublished Wits History Workshop paper, 1990, p. 4.

51 *Ibid.*; Mabin, ‘Origins of Segregatory Urban Planning’.

52 Parnell, ‘Slums Act’, pp. 112, 116–117, 123–124; S. Parnell, ‘Land Acquisition and the Changing Residential Face of Johannesburg, 1930–1955’, *Area*, 20.4. (1988), p. 311.

segregation. The 1931 Transvaal Town Planning Ordinance required municipalities to exercise greater control over town planning in terms of land use, building size and housing density. It is clear that the agencies created to administer town planning had racial zoning on their agenda.⁵³ Racial discrimination in public housing, for long a widespread practice as we have seen, was endorsed in law by the 1943 Housing Amendment Act which allowed for racial restrictions in ownership and occupancy in public housing schemes.⁵⁴

The growing historiography of urban segregation clearly shows that a variety of imperatives and mechanisms were at work to bring about racial zoning in towns and cities throughout the first half of the twentieth century and before. So it is now commonplace that the Group Areas Act was not the key segregationist measure that it was once thought to be. The idea that the National Party came to power and reversed the liberalising tendencies of the former United Party government's urban policy is part of liberal mythology. It has already been shown that urban segregationism was gaining momentum through the first half of the twentieth century. It is also clear that the momentum gained pace during the last few years of United Party rule in the 1940s. Local authorities in the major cities were becoming more and more concerned during the 1940s at the growth of uncontrolled black settlement in their midst. And so local urban planners, attached to the United Party-controlled city councils, became increasingly committed to racial zoning and the demolition of uncontrolled settlement. It is now known that the Johannesburg City Council approved, with only one dissenting vote, a scheme for the removal of the western areas black freehold settlements of Sophiatown, Martindale and Newclare – in 1944, over 10 years before the removals were eventually carried through by the National Party government. Similarly, the Cape Town City Council proposed the elimination of District Six as early as 1940.⁵⁵ It is also very apparent that the Durban City Council was eagerly advocating group areas principles in the 1940s. It has been suggested that the Durban City Council was 'the prime motivator' for the Group Areas Act.⁵⁶ Segregationist legislation directed against Indians – the 1943 Pegging Act and the 1946 'Ghetto Act' – also indicates the United Party government's predilection for the racial zoning of cities.⁵⁷

How, then, should we now view the Group Areas Act? Can one really play down the significance of a measure that systematised and rigidified urban segregation – and devastated the lives of hundreds of thousands of urban dwellers? What recent research does suggest is that, as drastic and destructive a measure as it was, the Group Areas Act did not radically transform the spatial configuration of South African cities. The measure represented a continuation and culmination of pre-1948 trends and policies. Nor was the act part of an NP apartheid blueprint. The idea of the NP coming to power in 1948 with a 'grand plan' has been demolished by Lazar and Posel.⁵⁸ A study of urban segregation policy confirms their findings. As Mabin has shown, there was no group areas master-plan. The legislation was not preceded by a major government commission. NP policy makers were uncertain as to how to achieve compulsory urban segregation. In the event it came to be

53 Mabin, 'Origins of Segregatory Urban Planning', pp. 10–12.

54 Parnell, 'Land Acquisition', p. 313.

55 Deon van Tonder, '“First Win the War, Then Clear the Slums?” The Genesis of the Western Areas Removal Scheme, 1940–1949', in P. Bonner, P. Delius and D. Posel (eds), *Apartheid's Genesis 1935–1962* (Johannesburg, 1993); Hart, 'Master Plans'; Saunders, 'District Six', p. 203.

56 B. Maharaj, 'The “Spatial Impress” of the Central and Local States: the Group Areas Act in Durban', in Smith (ed.), *The Apartheid City and Beyond*, pp. 75–76.

57 A. Mabin, 'Comprehensive Segregation: The Origins of the Group Areas Act and its Planning Apparatuses', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 18 (1992), p. 147.

58 See J. Lazar, 'Conformity and Conflict: Afrikaner nationalist politics in South Africa 1948–1961', unpublished Ph.D thesis, Oxford University, 1987; D. Posel, *The Making of Apartheid 1948–61: Conflict and Compromise* (Oxford, 1991).

as much a bureaucratic as a political process, with town planners centrally involved in the whole business of urban racial zoning.⁵⁹

The theme of segregation tends to dominate the literature on urban policy in South Africa. But segregation has, of course, been just one dimension – and not necessarily the main dimension – of the central and local state's efforts to control the black underclasses in urban areas. Segregation was essentially a form of spatial control over residential space. But residential segregation by itself was an insufficient means of achieving the kind of overall control for which the state was striving. The segregated space set aside for the occupation of the black underclasses also had to be subjected to control. This control took various forms. Housing policy, for instance, was geared not only towards the provision of shelter but also towards the subjugation of urban residents. A local state apparatus responsible for 'native administration' was established in each of the major urban areas. This apparatus further regulated the lives of those that fell under its sway. Access to municipal political space was closed down – instead forms of co-option were created in an attempt to head off the growth of urban social movements. On top of all this access to the city itself – or rather to the controlled, segregated spaces within the city – was tightly regulated by influx control and the pass laws.

Housing, 'Native Administration', Liquor Regulation and Influx Control

We do not yet have a good historical overview of South African housing policy. Once again there are insights gained from local case studies, but there is no clear overall picture. What does emerge is that housing policy changed over time and it was never uniform at any one time. There has for long been a tendency for controlling bodies to pursue a housing policy that differentiated between different sections of the black population: between migrant workers and the stabilised proletariat, between the aspirant middle class and those beneath them, between domestic workers and other urban employees, and between different ethnic groups.

The one form of accommodation that has been given particularly strong treatment in the historical literature is the mining compound. It has consistently been represented as a prime instrument of labour control.⁶⁰ For much of this century non-mining industrial and commercial companies have run their own private compounds, viewed as a convenient form of accommodation housing workers close to the work-place, thereby facilitating control and reducing transport costs. A variant of the compound was the hostel, often in the past referred to as 'barracks'. Single-sex hostels were a major form of worker accommodation in Durban, a city particularly reliant on migrant labour. There the first hostel for dock-workers was built as early as 1878.⁶¹ There seem to be very few historical studies of hostels. But in recent years, as hostel dwellers have come to be heavily implicated in urban violence, so have appeared a number of sociological and anthropological studies of hostel life.⁶²

Compounds and hostels represented a form of differential accommodation that separated single migrant workers from other urban residents. Attempts have also been made in the

59 Mabin, 'Comprehensive Segregation', pp. 406, 419–420, 425–426. See also U. Mesthrie, 'Tinkering and Tampering: A Decade of the Group Areas Act (1950–1960)', *South African Historical Journal*, 28 (1993).

60 See W. Worger, *South African's City of Diamonds* (New Haven, 1987); R. V. Turrell, *Capital and Labour on the Kimberley Diamond Fields, 1890–1971* (Cambridge, 1987); S. Moroney, 'The Development of the Compound as a Mechanism of Worker Control 1900–1912', *South African Labour Bulletin*, 4 (1978).

61 Hemson, 'Class Consciousness and Migrant Workers', p. 33.

62 M. Ramphela, *A Bed Called Home* (Cape Town, 1993); S. Jones, *Assaulting Childhood* (Johannesburg, 1993).

twentieth century to provide class-differentiated housing for a section of the African community. Urban policymakers and planners have tried, in some cities during the course of this century, to establish 'superior' housing areas for the aspirant black middle class. In Cape Town, Langa was established during the 1920s as a 'respectable' township and it was still the most middle class of Cape Town's African communities when Wilson and Mafeje produced their study in the early 1960s.⁶³ In the 1930s Lamontville, to the south of Durban, was designed as 'a model village', to be reserved for the 'better type of native'.⁶⁴ At much the same time McNamee township in Port Elizabeth was being planned as 'a garden village'.⁶⁵ In Soweto in the 1940s the Dube home ownership scheme was also geared towards the urban African middle class.⁶⁶

This policy of class-differentiated housing was very much part of a white 'liberal' agenda that was gaining ground in the 1930s and 1940s – espoused by people like Walter Jameson, chairperson of the Central Housing Board and expressed in the reports of the 1935 Young–Barrett Committee and the 1946–1948 Fagan Commission. In the event the policy did not get very far. Financial parsimony meant that the ideal of the 'model' or 'garden' village was never realised. Langa, Lamontville and McNamee were far from being quaint, green and picturesque. Moreover, when the National Party government came to power class-differentiated housing was abandoned in favour of another form of differentiation – ethnic zoning. Little has been written on this subject, apart from an article by Pirie. He shows how from the early 1950s ethnic zoning in black townships was 'implemented unobtrusively, with little official monitoring and reporting'. By 1973 approximately half of Soweto's wards were ethnically exclusive.⁶⁷

Life in segregated urban accommodation, whether it be employer controlled, class differentiated or ethnically zoned, was subject to further regulation. The overall task of regulation generally fell to the municipal 'native administration' departments – until the 1970s when the central state agencies, the Bantu Administration Boards, took over their responsibilities. A picture of municipal 'native administration' is beginning to emerge from a few case studies. The establishment of a native administration department in Durban in 1916 is often presented as a landmark event, creating the so-called 'Durban system'. Largely funded by the profits of the municipal beer monopoly, the 'Durban system' possessed the apparatus of control – a professional manager, pass inspectors, a nighttime curfew and restrictions on workers and work-seekers.⁶⁸ The 'Durban system' came to be viewed as a model. Features of it spread country-wide – but sometimes slowly. Johannesburg only established a native affairs department in 1927. Up till that time 'native administration' had fallen partly under the Council's Parks and Estates Committee.⁶⁹

A few recent studies have gone further to examine the actual ideology and dynamics of municipal 'native administration'. Robinson shows how from the 1920s urban 'native administration' came to be constituted as a specific field of study, the terrain of 'experts' with specialised knowledge.⁷⁰ Such 'experts' became the professional managers of these municipal departments. Often their style was paternalistic. One such person was McNamee,

63 M. Wilson and A. Mafeje, *Langa* (Cape Town, 1963), pp. 6–7.

64 A. L. Torr, 'The Social History of an Urban African Community: Lamont, c. 1930–1960', unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Natal, Durban, 1985, p. 72; A. L. Torr, 'Providing for the "Better-Class Native": The Creation of Lamontville, 1923–1933', *South African Geographical Journal*, 69 (1987), p. 35.

65 Robinson, 'Power of Apartheid', p. 219.

66 S. M. Parnell, 'The Ideology of African Home-ownership: The Establishment of Dube, Soweto, 1946–1955', unpublished Wits History Workshop paper, 1990.

67 G. H. Price, 'Ethno-linguistic Zoning in South African Black Townships', *Area*, 16.4 (1984), pp. 295–296.

68 Hemson, 'Class Consciousness and Migrant Workers', pp. 140–141; Swanson, 'Durban System', pp. 174–175.

69 K. Eales, 'Patriarchs, Passes and Privilege: Johannesburg's African Middle Classes and the Question of Night Passes for African Women, 1920–1931', in Bonner *et al.* (eds), *Holding Their Ground*, pp. 114–115.

70 Robinson, 'Power of Apartheid', pp. 133–141.

manager of Port Elizabeth's department from 1927 to 1945. Fluent in Xhosa and familiar with many residents, McNamee adopted a personal approach to management – an approach which masked his exercise of considerable power and patronage.⁷¹ A rather different figure was Dr F. J. Language, manager of Brakpan's non-European affairs department from 1943 to 1960. He represented a new generation of 'experts', with a Stellenbosch degree in anthropology and African languages and with experience as an anthropological fieldworker. He was imbued with the style and discourse that was to shape urban African administration from the 1950s – authoritarian and bureaucratic, strictly enforcing influx control, eliminating squatting and launching beer raids.⁷² The differences between McNamee and Language marked a shift from paternalism to 'professionalism' in urban 'native administration'.

This change of style and discourse should not, however, hide the continuities that have characterised urban management. Throughout this century and before, there has been an ongoing concern of maintaining tight control over the black urban underclasses. This is well known and well documented in the urban historiography. So the point is hardly worth belabouring. Most of the case studies tell the same story. There is Saunders' pithy comment on Langa in the 1930s: 'With its one entrance and several restrictions, Langa seemed to some like a jail.'⁷³ Robinson has laid particular stress on township regulations as a form of surveillance. In New Brighton, for instance, all residents had to possess residence certificates, to be produced on demand and visitors had to report their presence to the township superintendent.⁷⁴

Almost all aspects of black urban life were subject to some form of control or other. Control over leisure and recreation is particularly well covered in la Hausse's study of Durban. From the 1930s the Durban local authorities, through a newly appointed 'native welfare officer' sponsored or organised leisure – film shows, sport and dancing – to channel African energies into 'proper' activities. Opportunities for more spontaneous, indigenous leisure styles were restricted. Many of Durban's dance halls, for instance, were not under formal municipal control. But they came to be controlled spaces as strict dance hall regulations came to be promulgated in the 1930s.⁷⁵

At the centre of leisure control were the liquor restrictions. The attempt to control black drinking is a theme that has generated a growing body of research.⁷⁶ It is a theme which has many dimensions to it. Liquor control has been a form of cultural domination. It has been an assault on the informal sector and on the economic position of women. It has been a form of labour control and an instrument of segregation. Municipal liquor monopolies have provided the fiscal base for the institutions and mechanisms created to control the underclasses.

The nature of liquor control has varied from place to place, from time to time. Outright prohibition was tried in the Transvaal. An ordinance of 1902 banned the supply of liquor to any black person in a Transvaal urban area – a measure that failed, proving to be unenforceable.⁷⁷ The most common form of liquor control came to be the municipal monopoly – the local authority's sole right to produce and sell liquor for the black

71 G. Baines, 'The Contradictions of Community Politics: The African Petty Bourgeoisie and the New Brighton Advisory Board, c. 1937–1952' unpublished workshop paper, 1992, p. 4.

72 H. Sapire, 'Apartheid's "Testing Ground": Urban "Native Policy" and African Politics in Brakpan, South Africa, 1943–1948', *Journal of African History*, 35 (1994), pp. 102–107, 113–116.

73 Saunders, 'From Ndabeni to Langa', p. 219.

74 Robinson, 'The Politics of Urban Form', p. 13.

75 La Hausse, 'The Struggle for the City', pp. 253–270.

76 See particularly C. van Onselen, 'Randlords and Rotgut, 1886–1903', in *New Babylon*; Crush and Ambler (eds), *Liquor and Labour in Southern Africa* (Athens, Ohio, 1992); La Hausse, 'The Struggle for the City'.

77 J. Baker, 'Prohibition and Illicit Liquor on the Witwatersrand, 1902–1932' in Crush and Ambler (eds), *Liquor and Labour*, pp. 141–145.

population within its boundaries. The monopoly was viewed as a form of worker control – the manufacturers of the sorghum beer could limit its alcohol content and so limit productivity losses arising from drunkenness. More important, the monopoly generated revenue to fund the management of the black underclasses.⁷⁸ Enforcement of the monopoly required constant police raids on the producers and suppliers of ‘illicit’ liquor. The monopoly was introduced in Durban as early as 1909, but some other major centres waited until the late 1930s before instituting the monopoly. The police in Johannesburg had for long wanted to follow the Durban model, but liberal, church and temperance lobbies blocked the introduction of municipal beer halls in Johannesburg until they were finally opened in 1938.⁷⁹ The Cape Town City Council debated the introduction of a municipal monopoly, but finally shelved its beer hall plans in 1940 in the face of opposition from churches and the residents of Langa.⁸⁰ East London only established a monopoly in 1937.⁸¹

While liquor control was a form of cultural domination and a revenue-raising mechanism, it also served to close down economic space for the underclasses. As is well known, liquor production has been the mainstay of the informal sector and vital for the economic independence of women. Municipal beer monopolies had the effect of diverting income from the pockets of struggling black petty entrepreneurs into local state coffers. But the beer monopolies were just one strand in the assault on small-scale black commercial enterprise. A recent thesis by Musemwa shows how the Cape Town City Council consistently made life difficult for black traders in Langa. By withdrawing licenses and setting strict trading standards the Council succeeded in eliminating African enterprise from Langa.⁸²

A growing number of historical case studies have also shown how the institutions and structures of local power effectively excluded the African underclasses from local government. Denied the municipal franchise, Africans were fobbed off with cooperative institutions – first the advisory boards from early in the century, then the urban Bantu councils (UBCs – known as ‘useless boys clubs’) from the 1960s, followed by the community councils and the final failure – the black local authorities in the 1980s. The historical literature tells us most about the working of the advisory boards, little about the others. Advisory boards were officially set up under the 1923 Urban Areas Act (although they had already been created in Ndabeni and New Brighton before 1923). All the case studies show that the advisory boards were powerless bodies. Even their advisory role was generally not taken seriously by municipal councils. Before 1945 local authorities were not obliged to submit their native revenue account estimates to the boards. A white city councillor usually chaired the board meetings; in New Brighton this role was even assumed by McNamee, the manager of Port Elizabeth’s Native Administration Department.⁸³ It is also very evident that the advisory boards were used by the township elite for their own advancement, in particular to secure trading rights for themselves and their friends.⁸⁴ At the same time, though, it is also apparent that during the 1940s a number of political organisations, particularly the Communist Party, came to see the advisory board as a form of political space that could perhaps be exploited to the advantage of extraparliamentary opposition. In

78 See, for instance, P. la Hausse, ‘Drink and Cultural Innovation in Durban: The Origins of the Beerhall in South Africa, 1902–1916’, in Crush and Ambler (eds), *Liquor and Labour*, pp. 101–102.

79 E. Koch, ‘The Destruction of Marabi Culture – Urban Segregation in Johannesburg, 1923–1938’, unpublished Wits History Workshop paper, 1984, pp. 192–193.

80 M. Musemwa, ‘Aspects of the Social and Political History of Langa Township, Cape Town, 1927–1948’, unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Cape Town, 1993, pp. 70–76.

81 Nel, ‘Racial Segregation in East London’, p. 64.

82 Musemwa, ‘Langa Township’, pp. 58–86.

83 Baines, ‘The Contradictions of Community Politics’, p. 6.

84 See, for instance, Torr, ‘Lamont, c. 1930–1960’, pp. 128–131; Baines, ‘Origins of Urban Segregation’, p. 6.

the mid-1940s the Communist Party fielded candidates and won seats in advisory board elections as far afield as the East Rand, Port Elizabeth and Cape Town.⁸⁵

So far the discussion has concentrated on the historiography of urban policy directed towards controlling the African underclasses within urban areas. But one of the most crucial dimensions of urban policy was the attempt to restrict access to towns and cities. There are two major historical studies of influx control, by Hindson and Posel.⁸⁶ Both attempt to modify the crude determinist analysis that seemed to characterise the historiography of the 1970s, but Hindson in particular still remains firmly within the materialist tradition. His book shows how 'the aims and functions of pass controls have changed to reinforce the dominant relations of production in different historical periods, economic sectors and regions through the exercise of controls over the movement, residence and terms of employment of working people'. Thus, during the era of primary industrialisation, pass controls were designed to secure the supply of migrant labour for the mining industry. Later, as secondary industry developed, the controls were modified, producing a system of 'differentiated labour-power', to accommodate the needs of different capitalist sectors.⁸⁷ Posel's analysis is less reductionist. Her study shows that the influx control policy of the National Party government from the 1950s had two main objectives – first, to ensure an adequate supply of African labour and to channel that labour to where it was needed and, second, to restrict the process of African urbanisation so as to limit the social and political problems that were perceived to accompany that process.⁸⁸

Both Hindson's broad chronological sweep and Posel's specific focus on the apartheid era examine policy making at the national level. They have little to say about local state imperatives and regional particularities. Moreover, the many local case studies have themselves given more attention to segregation than to influx control. But there is enough to tell us that there were regional variations and some local autonomy in the implementation of influx control, at least before the 1950s. The Port Elizabeth City Council, for instance, earned some kind of liberal image for itself by not implementing influx control before the 1950s. It seems that this resulted from the domination of the city council by commercial and manufacturing interests who wanted to secure an abundant labour supply.⁸⁹ By contrast, the Durban local authority was generally an enthusiastic proponent of influx control from early in the twentieth century. The city's proximity to the reserves and its reliance on migrant labour would seem to explain this.⁹⁰ Cape Town's record in influx control also seems to belie the image of the 'liberal city'. A recent study has given Cape Town 'the dubious distinction' of being 'a pioneering city' in the implementation of influx control. From an early date the Cape Town City Council controlled the African influx through a system of service contracts.⁹¹

Continuity and Contradiction

Any discussion of South African urban policy will tend inevitably to centre on the notion of control. It is a concept that pervades the urban historiography. That is not surprising, because numerous measures and mechanisms have been devised and implemented to

85 H. Sapire, 'The Stay-away of the Brakpan Location, 1944' in B. Bozzoli (ed.), *Class, Community and Conflict* (Johannesburg, 1987), pp. 337–388; T. Lodge, *Black Politics in South Africa since 1945* (Johannesburg, 1983), p. 78; Baines, 'The Contradictions of Community Politics', p. 19; Musemwa, 'Langa Township', pp. 172–174.

86 D. Hindson, *Pass Controls and the Urban African Proletariat* (Johannesburg, 1987); Posel, *Making of Apartheid*.

87 Hindson, *Pass Controls*, pp. 97–98.

88 Posel, *Making of Apartheid*, pp. 75–76, 129–144.

89 Baines, 'The Contradictions of Community Politics', p. 15.

90 Maylam, 'The Evolution of Urban Apartheid', pp. 265, 269.

91 Kinkad-Weekes, 'Africans in Cape Town', pp. 563–566.

control the black-dominated classes in South African urban areas. But there is a danger in viewing control in teleological, monolithic, functionalist terms – creating a picture of powerful state agencies ever tightening the screws of control, with growing effect, in the service of the dominant class. Such a picture is, paradoxically, both appropriate and misleading. Appropriate, because controls have been steadily tightened through the course of the twentieth century. But also misleading, because the whole apparatus of urban segregation and apartheid has been riddled with contradiction and dysfunctionality.

One also comes up against paradox in trying to chart the evolution of urban segregation and apartheid. One tendency is to stress an apparent sharp turn in policy in the mid-twentieth century: the National Party comes to power, reverses the more liberal policy trends of the 1930s and 1940s, centralises urban policy making and administration and imposes a monolithic system of racial separation and domination, vigorously reshaping cities in the apartheid mould. Certainly these trends cannot be denied. The central state did intervene more directly in urban policy after 1950, weakening local state autonomy. And urban apartheid was more rigid, more systematic and more vigorously implemented than urban policy in the preceding segregation era. But the research of recent years shows that the long-term continuities of urban policy are more striking than the discontinuities. Most features of the apartheid city – restricted access to the urban area, racial residential segregation and other restrictive regulations – are to be found in nineteenth-century colonial towns: the urban locations created in the mid-nineteenth-century eastern Cape, the compounds of Kimberley and the Rand, the pass controls instituted in the Boer republics and Natal in the second half of the nineteenth century⁹² and the measures to control casual labour instituted in Durban during the 1870s.⁹³

The stress on the discontinuity between the segregation era and apartheid is part of South African liberal mythology. The idea that the National Party government reversed the liberalising urban policy of the previous United Party government and United Party-controlled city councils is untenable. There is so much evidence to show that the Group Areas Act was very much in line with the earlier plans and practices of United Party policy makers. Many cities – Durban, Pietermaritzburg and East London, among others – are known to have been pretty thoroughly segregated by 1950. Cape Town, often projected as the ‘liberal city’, had a tradition of segregation. United Party-controlled councils had envisaged and planned the destruction of black urban communities – such as Johannesburg’s Western Areas – long before it was eventually carried through by the National Party Government. Influx control in the 1950s and 1960s represented a tightening of pre-existing measures rather than a significant new policy departure. All this tends to be concealed in the liberal mythology, which has tried to cover up the harshness of pre-1948 segregationism by pinning the severities of urban apartheid onto Afrikaner nationalism.

So the essential continuity of urban policy towards the black underclasses should be stressed. But this continuity was not the gradual unfolding of a carefully planned policy based on well-formulated principles. The approach adopted over the decades more often involved *ad hoc* responses to short-term situations than the application of theory. For instance, the 1923 Natives (Urban Areas) Act, often viewed as the foundation-stone of urban apartheid, embodied most of the key mechanisms and institutions – the segregated township, influx control, fiscal segregation and the instrument of co-option (the advisory board). But the impact of the legislation was limited because municipalities chose whether or not to implement these provisions, which were not obligatory, according to their own means and interests.

92 See Hindson, *Pass Controls*, pp. 21–24.

93 Hemson, ‘Class Consciousness and Migrant Workers’, pp. 24–26.

Urban policy making thus tended to be a rather haphazard, piecemeal process. Competing constituencies clamoured for their interests to be served. Contradictory imperatives bore upon the policy-making process. The contradictions often centred around financial considerations. The overall objective of central and local state urban policy towards the black underclasses has been clear and consistent, hardly an interpretive problem for the historian. That objective has been to exercise tight control over those underclasses. The contradictions have arisen in the attempt to realise that objective. First, effective control mechanisms generally required significant financial expenditure. Second, control often provoked popular resistance or defiance.

Perhaps the key institution of segregation and apartheid has been the black township. For many decades the ideal of accommodating the black underclasses in segregated townships was part-and-parcel of white local government discourse. But the ideal was never fully realised, largely because of the heavy capital investment that it would have required. In the urban historiography there are many references to the financial parsimony of local authorities.⁹⁴ Durban's local authority may have been the meanest of all, insistent for much of this century that no money from the general borough fund be used to finance black housing. Municipal beer monopolies, operating as a kind of self-financing mechanism, represented an attempt to resolve this contradiction between cost and control. But the funds derived from the monopolies were used mainly to finance the local 'native affairs' bureaucracy; little went into black housing. Thus, the provision of such housing always fell very far short of what was needed. One consequence of the housing shortage was the rapid growth of shack settlements, especially from the 1940s. Shack settlements further epitomised the contradiction – they resolved the cost issue, imposing a minimal financial burden on the local authority, but posed enormous problems of social and political control.

Influx control has also been a highly contradictory phenomenon. Indeed, influx control showed up perhaps the most fundamental contradiction of urban apartheid – the contradiction between the inclusionary and exclusionary imperatives of the system. The ultimate objective of apartheid was to achieve the unattainable – to maximise the exploitation of cheap black urban labour, while minimising the presence of the labourers in white urban areas. Certain devices went a little way towards resolving this contradiction – the border industry policy, the wholesale physical removal of black townships into Bantustans (in cases where the urban area was close to a Bantustan) and the development of commuter rail networks to convey workers from more distant Bantustans into urban areas.⁹⁵ Ultimately, though, the contradiction was too fundamental to be resolved. The exclusionary imperative could never be carried too far so as to threaten the labour supply. Moreover, this exclusionary dimension of influx control tended to be self-defeating. A vicious cycle tended to develop, especially from the 1950s. The increasing displacement of the 'surplus' urban population to the reserves/Bantustans aggravated overcrowding and rural impoverishment in those areas. This in turn gave people the incentive to defy influx control and move back to urban areas. As Greenberg has put it, 'control has made necessary more controls; the successful damming up of labour in the African rural areas has created inducements to burst

94 See, for instance; A. Stadler, 'Birds in the Cornfield: Squatter Movements in Johannesburg, 1944–1947', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 6 (1979), pp. 116–117; Koch, 'Marabi Culture', pp. 187–188, 193; Sapire, 'African Settlement and Segregation in Brakpan', pp. 162–168; Robinson, 'Politics of Urban Form', p. 7; P. Maylam, 'Municipal Fraud: The Operation of Durban's Native Revenue Account, 1908–1953', *Journal of Natal and Zulu History*, 11 (1988).

95 See G. H. Pirie, 'African Township Railways and the South African State, 1902–1963', *Journal of Historical Geography*, 13 (1987).

the dams'.⁹⁶ Indeed, the pass laws provoked massive defiance, making them difficult to enforce. Although millions were arrested under the pass laws, millions more must have evaded them. And, of course, since the pass laws were among the most hated apartheid measures, they provoked widespread resistance.

Given these contradictions it is hardly surprising that urban policy was contested terrain, not only between the dominant and the dominated classes, but also within the dominant class. This contestation requires us to look particularly at the relationship between the central state and local state and between the central/local state and capital. A crude instrumentalist view of these relationships is clearly no longer tenable – one cannot view the local state as an extension of the central state and the latter as the instrument of capital.

For a better understanding of urban policy we need to know more about the central–local state relationship. The local case studies tend to neglect the role of the central state, while other studies focus rather exclusively on policy making at the national level. But there are enough references here and there to show that the relationship was not always without tension. Until the 1960s the local state seems to have enjoyed a fair degree of autonomy in urban policy. When the National Party government tried to assume more centralised control of urban policy in the 1950s it found that its own Native Affairs Department policy makers were inexperienced in matters of urban 'native administration' and therefore reliant on policy proposals emanating from municipalities.⁹⁷ Fuller centralisation only came in the early 1970s with the establishment of the administration boards as the central state agencies responsible for the control of urban blacks.⁹⁸

When central–local state tensions did arise they often centred on financial issues. Each party tried to shift the burden of black housing costs onto the other. The Johannesburg City Council resented the central state's lack of financial support for black housing in the 1930s. In turn, it seems that the central state virtually forced Johannesburg to introduce the municipal beer hall system in 1937.⁹⁹ From the 1920s to the 1950s the central state was constantly at loggerheads with the Durban local authority over the latter's misuse of its native revenue account funds. The central state clearly believed that Durban should have been spending more of its native revenue account funds on black housing, thereby relieving the central state of some of this burden.¹⁰⁰ Financial issues often lay beneath whatever wrangling did occur over the implementation of group areas from the 1950s. It has already been shown that there was widespread enthusiasm for group areas principles in most municipalities. However it does seem that local authorities feared the cost implications of building the townships which would be necessary to complete the segregation process. Thus, for instance, the local authority in East London, which had a strong tradition of segregation, came into dispute with the central government over who should bear the financial responsibility for housing.¹⁰¹ Further group areas case studies may produce a similar picture.

There is also little in the historiography that tells us about the role of capitalist interests in the making of urban policy. As we have already seen, the capitalist concern to secure its labour supply would tend to conflict with the exclusionary, controlling dimensions of urban

96 S. B. Greenberg, 'The State in Contemporary South Africa: The Contradictions of Control', unpublished paper, 1984, p. 25; P. Maylam, 'The Rise and Decline of Urban Apartheid in South Africa', *African Affairs*, 89 (1990), p. 72; Hindson, *Pass Controls*, p. 99.

97 Posel, *Making of Apartheid*, p. 263.

98 See S. Bekker and R. Humphries, *From Control to Confusion: The Changing Role of Administration Boards in South Africa, 1971–1983* (Pietermaritzburg, 1985).

99 Koch, 'Marabi Culture', pp. 196–197.

100 See Maylam, 'Municipal Fraud'.

101 E. L. Nel, 'The Making of Territorial Apartheid: The Case of East London's Locations', unpublished Wits History Workshop paper, 1990, pp. 9–11.

policy. There is evidence to show that employers generally liked to house their labourers close to the work-place, often in private compounds. But such enclaves close to white residential areas were an anathema to white ratepayers. Capitalists were obviously keen to prevent influx control impeding the labour supply. In Durban in the late 1940s influx control regulations were adjusted to accommodate the labour needs of employers.¹⁰² We know, too, that during the 1950s some National Party ideologues were intent on a much tighter system of influx control, while other National Party pragmatists were concerned to safeguard the interests of capital.¹⁰³ Capitalists were also concerned with maintaining the cheapness of labour – a concern that could bring them into conflict with the state. Low wages necessarily entailed workers paying subeconomic rents and fares. Thus, central or local state subeconomic housing and transport schemes amounted to a wage subsidy. But how these tensions and conflicts of interest were played out is far from clear.

The relationship between the central state and local state in the making of urban policy is a theme requiring further research. So too is the state–capital relationship. This was explored in very broad terms by radical South Africanist scholars in the 1970s. However, little of this work had much to say about urban policy. During the 1980s the issue came to be lost sight of, as structuralist analysis went out of favour. In rejecting economic determinism and reductionism, social historians tended to shy away from even addressing such broad issues as the state–capital relationship, preferring to engage in microstudies. While these case studies have been most useful, they have often stopped short of illuminating those larger questions that concerned scholars in the 1970s.

While social history offered a challenge to structuralist analysis, post-modernism has been even more dismissive. Post-modernists reject the essentialism and totalising discourse that seemed to be so characteristic of structuralism. The fate of structuralism and the political economy approach has perhaps been a case of ‘the baby and the bath-water’. It is one thing to throw out grand theoretical claims, but it is quite another to discard structural and material considerations altogether, as seems to be happening. It is impossible to analyse or understand South African urban policy when it is set apart from material forces. This is not to make a reductionist assertion, but rather to stress the continuing salience of materialist-type analysis in the field of urban history. Nor is this to reject some of the concerns of post-modernism, which can also throw light on urban historical issues. For instance, the discourse of urban policy and management is a field that is being opened up and yielding useful insights.

There is clearly a need to transcend the afrocentrism that has characterised South Africanist urban historical research over the past 20 years or so. Not enough studies have examined towns and cities as whole entities. Just as apartheid has fragmented cities and divided up the urban population, so has the historiography tended to concentrate its attention on oppressive, discriminatory urban policy and on the black victims of that policy. We now have a good picture of the policy and practice of urban apartheid, but other broad themes have been underworked. There is scope for looking at the total spatial organisation of cities and towns – not just black townships. Further research could be done showing more clearly how urban resources have come to be allocated so inequitably. We know about the material deprivation of the urban underclasses. That has become well documented. Mere impression will give the other side of the coin – the obvious point that municipal budgets have been heavily skewed in favour of the white population. But this gross inequality needs to be documented more specifically and precisely. This could be part of the process of disclosure, now under way in South Africa. Although the main concern of the disclosure

102 Maylam, ‘The Evolution of Urban Apartheid’, pp. 272–273.

103 See Posel, *Making of Apartheid*, pp. 50–60.

process is to uncover criminal acts carried out in defence of apartheid, historians and others should also continue to reveal the more general crimes of apartheid – such as the inequitable allocation of resources in urban areas. After all the redress of urban inequalities will have to be a priority of the new political order in South Africa. Such redress will require some understanding of urban history and how past inequalities arose. Urbanist scholars could then find themselves contributing not just to academic journals, but also to the pressing programme of reconstruction now being embarked upon.