

Editors' Introduction

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This special issue of *Transformation* focuses on the changes that are occurring in the post-apartheid South African city, exploring both the continuities and disjunctures from a variety of theoretical and disciplinary perspectives. Cities are important drivers of economic growth as well as key sites of social change. They are a focus of interest for geographers and other social scientists attempting to understand the dynamic forces shaping South African cities both in their own terms, and in the context of cities in other parts of the 'developed' and 'developing' world. Cities are locales for ambitious plans to address social inequality while promoting economic development, particularly in the wake of institutionalised discrimination and segregation under apartheid, yet as Mabin points out, the results are often a 'broad failure of policy and planning to shift the conditions of life in the cities'. 'Fragmentation' is a recurring metaphor, one chosen to represent urban change in South Africa in a recent collection (Harrison et al 2003) reviewed in these pages (Mabin, this issue). Does this term have much or any meaning, and is it an appropriate tag to place on complexity?

The papers presented here provide a variety of perspectives on this and other debates about post-apartheid urban transition. They also show the richness of the considerable literature on urban space, urban struggles and urban change which has characterised the last decade. This issue began with an offer by Alan Mabin to produce a translated version of a special issue on South African political geography by an Italian journal. It took on its own life but we do publish a couple of the pieces that were originally offered to us and only otherwise exist in Italian. Interested South Africans may be surprised to learn that urban issues in this region have been taken up and debated by scholars in Italy, France, Germany, Britain and the USA amongst other countries.

Bénit and Gervais-Lambony's paper begins the debate by locating South

Africa's cities in the contemporary moment, one characterised by the word 'globalisation', with all the meanings that might (or might not) inhere in that word. It is certainly the perception of city governments that globalisation is a script, dictated from the outside and unavoidable, to which South African cities must respond. This has a set of impacts that are carefully outlined by the authors. In particular, this script writes certain visible spaces within the city – the 'shop windows' – into the performance of global competitiveness, while writing other spaces – 'the back of the shop' – out of the play altogether. So much for a vision of achieving social justice for the poor: cities' images as attractive locations for global capital must be maintained, even at the expense of most of their citizens. If this is a bleak view, Zarina Patel's article does suggest that some success has been achieved in improving living environments through the implementation of sustainable development strategies such as Local Agenda 21 in South African cities, projects showcased at the World Summit on Sustainable Development held in Johannesburg in 2002. She highlights 'informal political activity leading to environmental change' that can be identified in South African cities, while at the same time noting that real political will is often lacking and institutional change needed. She is not very happy with the sustainable development paradigm, however. Instead she proposes a landscape approach that brings urban populations and their interface with the physical environment directly onto the centre stage in a less prescriptive way.

It is useful however to move away from the present moment to view South African cities in the context of a broader sweep of history. This ambitious task is attempted by Alan Mabin, who sets post-apartheid change (which he argues has occurred in often unexpected ways) against the backdrop of South African urban history, in particular the history of urban segregation and all that that policy implied for cities. In charting changing forms of segregation in South African cities, Mabin tackles the controversial concept of 'fragmentation' and tries to assess its validity in the context of both apartheid-induced changes such as forced removal to townships, and (largely unexplored) processes of social segregation in 'white' areas which, from the 1950s, also transformed urban space. He refers too to the emergence of the gated community or protected townhouse complex, which in the post-apartheid period has offered a further twist to the twin forces of segregation and suburbanisation, one that cannot be understood solely in colour terms. The paper ends by considering the extent to which territorial transformation in cities can be effectively governed by institutional forces. Mabin emphasises

continuities and the power of the suburban message which dominated the one almost entirely white middle class.

Mabin's interest in suburbia provides a useful entry-point into the piece by Richard Ballard, who takes up the tools of cultural geography to explore linguistic and discursive constructions of 'belongingness' and 'otherness', and the often negative outworkings of these ways of shaping reality in terms of exclusion and prejudice. While the focus of many of the other papers is South Africa's largest urban centre, Johannesburg, Ballard's work was undertaken in Durban's Berea, where Ballard investigates claims to 'nativeness'. He is able to show how some white suburban dwellers continue subtly to claim these parts of the city as their preserve, arguing despite their settler status that they 'got there first' and that newcomers to these spaces should respect the rules – 'when in Rome, do as the Romans do'. This flies absolutely in the face of the reconstitution of a 'new' South Africa.

Placed beside papers that emphasise political and economic forces shaping cities, the emphasis on cultural constructions is refreshing and adds a further facet to our understanding of change in South African cities. This approach is continued in the final article in this issue, where Manase, a literary studies scholar, uses works of fiction to explore the meanings of South African cities like Johannesburg, as well as Zimbabwean cities, for their inhabitants. Here we finally encounter the intruders to the suburban idyll and the world it has generated. While the focus here is on life in the city centre and townships rather than the suburbs, and themes are fragmentation and displacement rather than 'belongingness', Manase nonetheless shows the cities as 'sites where failure and opportunities exist', the 'ambivalent urban condition'.

There are several reviews in this issue. Amongst these, Mabin looks at a particularly important recent collection on urban policy and development in South Africa and Karumbidza considers a book on rural space in Zimbabwe.