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The middle class and suburbia: desegregation towards non-racialism in South Africa?

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ABSTRACT

'Non-racial democracy' is an aspirational goal of South Africa's post-apartheid democracy. Deracialisation of public spheres, notably education and work, has led to high rates of upward social mobility among black South Africans and the increasing racial diversification of the middle class, which under apartheid, had remained overwhelmingly white. Despite the increased racial integration of public life, the majority of South Africans continue to live in mono-racial residential areas. Much of the responsibility for this lies in the legacy of apartheid geography. The legacy of apartheid has entrenched the spatial segregation of the officially defined races and ensured that white suburbs were the most socially advantaged and desirable places in which to live. Today, white suburbs continue to occupy the top rungs of the residential ladder, their privilege protected by the economic costs of entry. Nonetheless, high rates of black upward mobility and aspiration result in increased black entry into these historically white spaces, which are themselves undergoing considerable change in shape and character. As a result, white suburbia constitutes a major site where the struggle for non-racialism is taking place.

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'Non-racial democracy' is regularly cited as an aspirational goal of South African democracy. Its essence is captured in the preamble of the country's democratic constitution which proclaims the commitments to healing 'the divisions of the past' and establishing 'a society based on democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights' – 'a democratic and open society' in which government 'is based on the will of the people and every citizen is equally protected by law' (Republic of South Africa 1996, Preamble). In other words, the suggestion is that race should no longer matter, not in the sense that past wrongs which are an outcome of racism should not be righted, but rather that racial considerations which the law considers are not corrective of past racism, whether personal or institutional, should have no legal or political bearing in society.

Those who attempt to define non-racialism in practice are entering dangerous territory. Does non-racialism simply mean that people no longer discriminate against each along lines of race (colour-blindness)? Does it constitute the realisation of racial equality (so that societal institutions are 'demographically representative')? Does it mean no more

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than that South Africans should enjoy equal opportunity, regardless of race or background (meritocracy)? Or does it simply require South Africans from different racial backgrounds and communities to live harmoniously together (multi-culturalism)? There is no easy resolution of resulting debates, as the feisty contestations about these different understandings testify. However, what is less widely recognised, or perhaps just less widely made explicit, is that it is in the arena of the middle class that the struggle for non-racialism, however defined, is largely fought out.

Major attention has been paid to how post-apartheid society has fostered an expansion of the middle class, and how this has been achieved through increased upward mobility by people of colour, primarily because of the deracialisation of education and the labour market, and secondly, because of compensatory discriminatory policies of 'equity employment' (affirmative action) (Seekings and Nattrass 2006; Southall 2016). As a result, South Africa is composed of three major social levels: 'the almost entirely African poor, the mostly African working class, and the multi-racial middle classes and elites' (Seekings 2008, 7). Jeremy Seekings' use of the term 'multi-racial', as he attests in a wide-ranging essay covering interracial integration and interaction, is because South Africa's different racial segments largely mix within socially demarcated spaces (notably the workplace, but also shops, churches, schools, universities and sport) while otherwise remaining largely separate.

Much of the responsibility for this lies in the legacy of apartheid geography, which deliberately sought to entrench the spatial segregation of the apartheid defined 'races.' This combines with racial differentials of wealth, which are *de facto* protected by the property rights enshrined in the constitution, to further protect still heavily racialised patterns of residence and home ownership. As a result, the large majority of South Africans continue to live in what are effectively mono-racial spaces. Correspondingly, the argument here is that any serious movement towards 'non-racialism' depends heavily upon the continued upward social mobility of African, coloured and Indian (black) middle-class people into white suburbia, consequent racial mixing, and forging of common interests.[1]

To put it crudely, while many (but not all) among the black middle class(es) aspire to move into white areas and to attain 'white' standards of living, the reverse does not apply.[2] To the extent that it has been attained or is likely to be attained, non-racialism is likely to be an overwhelmingly suburban, middle-class phenomenon.

The legacy of apartheid geography

Notwithstanding numerous contemporary complaints that little has changed since the arrival of democracy, the extent of change in South Africa since 1994 can be characterised as profound. Formal deracialisation of most public and many private spheres of society, most notably government, schooling and education, the workplace and the media, along with various post-apartheid initiatives such as 'equity employment' and black economic empowerment have resulted in higher rates of upward social mobility by historically designated black groups into the middle class which, in whatever way it is defined, has become much more racially mixed and varied as a result (Seekings and Nattrass 2005; Southall 2016). It would be churlish to decry this progress away from the racialised social patterns of the past. Nonetheless, if non-racialism is taken to be more than a numbers game, if it is to extend towards a society in which people of different 'races'

interact socially as a matter of course, then South Africa still has a long way to go, as many patterns of apartheid persist.

Building upon the segregationist policies of the past, apartheid sought to extend the spatial separation of the races. Its most notorious efforts were devoted to reversing the flow of Africans to the urban areas which had increased so rapidly prior to and after the Second World War. The post-1948 NP government introduced a battery of urban legislation designed to minimise the opportunities for Africans to live in urban areas except in so far as their labour was required by the white economy. Particularly critical were the Illegal Squatting Act of 1951, which was aimed at limiting peri-urban squatting by Africans seeking or already in employment in adjacent towns; and the Native Laws Amendment Act of 1952, which 'laid the basis for all state intervention to control the distribution of labour between town and country, and between towns' from that time onwards. The latter Act also introduced the practice of canalising migrant workers through labour bureaux in rural areas, from which permission to go to 'prescribed' (mainly urban) areas had to be obtained. Thereafter, the Group Areas Act of 1950, as amended in 1957 and 1966, imposed control of inter-racial property transactions and inter-racial changes in occupation of property, the aim being the establishment of areas for the exclusive occupation of each racial group. Racial zoning not only inhibited the limited inter-group social contact which might naturally occur (within sports clubs and churches, for example), but constituted the foundation of segregated education, health facilities and social services (Lemon 1987, 218–23).

All this is highly familiar to anyone with a basic knowledge of apartheid South Africa, as is the fact that in crucial ways it was a gigantic failure, as ultimately the regime was unable to stem the growth of the urban African population. Unemployment and hunger in the (overwhelmingly rural) Bantustans, which functioned as labour reserves for the white economy, drove Africans to the towns and cities, where their labour was required by employers. By 1980, although the census officially recorded that around 38 per cent (or 6.5 million) Africans lived in urban areas, more reliable estimates indicated that the more likely number was 8.6 million, or 45 per cent of South Africa's black population. Even this failed to account for perhaps up to a million African people living in metropolitan areas in defiance of the pass laws. Overall, therefore, African urbanisation was probably not short of 50 per cent (Lemon 1987, 224).

By the early 1980s the economic inevitability of African urbanisation was becoming apparent even to the government, and it began to think in terms of 'orderly urbanisation' to replace influx control. The Riekert Commission of 1979 on legislation affecting manpower utilisation recommended changes to influx control, its basic idea being to differentiate between permanent urban and temporary migrant black populations, the status and freedoms of the former being improved (subject to the availability of jobs and housing), while the latter's position would be rendered even more tenuous. This culminated in the abolition of influx control in 1986, which at one fell swoop removed the huge legislative apparatus governing the entry of blacks into urban areas from the statute book. Although this did not restore South African citizenship to 'citizens' of the four homelands which had accepted independence and who were resident in 'white South Africa', the passage of this particular piece of legislation signalled the beginning of the end for apartheid. By 1992, just over 11 million Africans (or 36 per cent of the African population) were living in metropolitan areas and another 3.2 million (or 10.6 per cent) lived in other urban areas, the remainder living in rural areas within and outside the homelands (SAIRR 1992/93, 254–55).

By 2001, the urbanisation levels of whites (89.9 per cent) and Indians (97.5 per cent) appeared to have reached their saturation points, with that of coloureds (86.8 per cent) following close behind. In contrast after 1994, the momentum towards African urbanisation had begun to pick up pace, the flow towards the cities, towns and their peripheries increased by in-migration (both temporary and permanent) to South Africa from other countries in the region (Statistics South Africa 2006, 19–21). Overall, the total level of urbanisation in South Africa increased from 52 per cent in 1990 to 66 per cent in 2018 (IRR 2020, 22). Given continued high rates of overall in-migration to urban areas, it is fully expected that this will continue for the foreseeable future. Unsurprisingly, the African National Congress government has struggled to keep abreast of the increasing demand for housing and service delivery in historically black areas, as well as the burgeoning number of informal settlements in peri-urban areas. Although it claims to have provided over 5 million 'subsidised housing and housing opportunities' since 1994, Lindiwe Sisulu (when housing minister), observed in early 2021 that about 2.2 million households (or about 12.5 million people) continue to live in informal settlements (*Business Day* 2021).

The reality of all this is that although residential patterns are changing, the imprint of apartheid geography remains remarkably strong. When Africans migrate from the rural areas, overwhelmingly they do so to established African 'townships' or to informal settlements which tend to be almost exclusively African, even if they are on the edge of white, coloured or Indian occupied areas. Likewise, the other racial groups continue to mostly live in residential areas which were racially demarcated historically. But what happens when things change?

Changing patterns of race and class in white suburbia

Seekings (2008) has identified the main forms of residential integration. First, integration in existing neighbourhoods takes place in apartment blocks, mainly in inner-urban areas; private housing (movement of higher-income African people into formerly white/coloured areas or coloured people into formerly white areas); second, integration in new neighbourhoods takes place either in state-driven low-income projects, or voluntary integration in new private housing areas. It is not unknown, but few whites, coloureds and Indians move 'downwards' into historically black areas.[3] Correspondingly, the major potential for change occurs when individuals and households from black communities climb the residential ladder 'upwards', at whose pinnacle lie the white suburbs, the site of the most desirable housing which also enjoy the historical legacy of the best public schools and the best access to a host of other public and private services. As Marc Hunter has so carefully shown, the location of the best schools in white suburbia has set off 'a musical chairs-like process' whereby the children of better off families, from different communities, are sent by aspirant parents from less well-endowed areas to more prestigious schools in better off areas, leaving their empty desks to be filled by other learners. As a result, families' resources are drawn up the system, leading to a 'partial deracialisation of privilege but not to a fundamental reduction in inequality and not to the fundamental "de-whitening" of the grammar or privilege' (Hunter 2019, 5). In short, there is a constant striving to gain access to white suburbia.

To participate in this process of upward mobility, resources (capital, access to bonds, and income to service them) are needed for families to buy their way in higher reaches of suburbia. In short, upward mobility into better-off suburbia implies becoming middle class. But does this lead to significant interaction across established racial fault-lines and increase the potential for non-racialism?

Any attempt to answer this question must draw upon a literature that is not only constantly increasing, but which is also extremely diverse. As Alan Mabin, the geographer, has observed, 'South African urban change' has always been 'more complex than some linear process', and the changes affecting the post-apartheid cities 'are far from those of racial desegregation alone' (Mabin 2005, 44–45). From the late years of apartheid on, people of colour previously disqualified by the Group Areas Act moved into white spaces: at first, into low-cost rental accommodation in high rise apartments in central areas and in older, low-density white areas, as both businesses and white inhabitants left for newer, outer, more sprawling suburbs. Subsequently, as black, coloured and Indian people moved upward into the middle class, they were to penetrate further into white suburbia. Unsurprisingly, therefore, given how apartheid sought to restrict physical movement, black *spatial* mobility has become a metaphor for black *upward* social mobility.

Mabin is at one with the most prominent thrust in the emerging literature by observing that a major effect has been the arrival of 'new geographies of exclusion' based on the inheritance of racial division and the largely unregulated workings of property and labour markets, and how the poverty of the townships continues to be hidden away. New forms of segregation are arising – no longer simply structured around race, but rather around intensified divisions relating to wealth, income, new forms of employment and culture. Such 'neo-apartheid' constitutes a shift to class-based rather than race-based segregation (Mabin 2005).

This argument is pursued here by reference, first, to black middle class movement into Johannesburg's northern suburbs, home to 'the majority of Johannesburg's million strong white population' (Mabin 2014, 407); and second, to coloured middle class movement into a predominantly Afrikaans-speaking suburb in Cape Town.

Transformation in older established white areas in Johannesburg: Norwood and Orange Grove

At one time, all suburbs were 'new', and the origins of both Norwood and Orange Grove, some 12 kilometres from Market Square in downtown Johannesburg, lie in the early 1900s. Founded by private property developers, they were advertised as salubrious places to live, with their relatively small stands, shops and 'village atmosphere' making them relatively affordable and attractive to white families with children. During and after the First World War, foreign immigrants – notably Italians – were recruited to work at the nearby African Explosives and Chemicals Industries (opened to supply the gold mines with explosives), leading to the creation of a 'Little Italy' in Orange Grove. In contrast, Norwood attracted predominantly English-speaking white middle-class residents.

They always had a small number of black residents (working for shops, businesses and as domestics), yet until the 1980s the two suburbs remained resolutely white. Thereafter things began to change rapidly. The influx of blacks into inner city areas led to declining

property values, increasing population densities, and white flight, a process of 'greying' which moved steadily outward. This had a marked impact upon both Norwood and Orange Grove, where by 2001, some 36 500 residents were matched by a substantial (and ever-growing) black population (19 000) along with some 3000 Indians and coloureds.

Along with this demographic transformation, came a marked change in the flavour of the commercial areas, with established shops and service providers moving away to be replaced by second-hand shops, pawn brokers, fast food joints, ethnic groceries and (horror of horrors) Nigerian owned cellphone shops, video rentals and illegal bars. They were soon to be joined by Pentecostal churches and traditional healers. Although Grant Avenue (a major thoroughfare) continues to attract the middle class, the smaller shops catering to them are battling to survive, and increasingly they are being vacated as property prices and rentals fall. Furthermore, because of these changes and associated fear of crime, residents now increasingly use their cars to go to the two local supermarkets, resulting in parking becoming increasingly difficult and encouraging a drift of customers to a hypermarket and shopping mall which has been developed a couple of kilometres away. There are resulting disputes about 'development projects' planned by the City Council, amid fears that the 'village atmosphere' of Norwood is under constant threat.

A study provided by Ursula Scheidegger (2015) reports that notwithstanding the rapid transformation of these former white suburbs, there are strong continuities with the past. Although more non-white residents have moved in the two areas, the local residents' and business associations do not reflect the heterogeneity of the population, are not representative and consciously exclude certain population groups, for example tenants and informal businesses. Likewise, local (council) ward committees lack diversity and are dominated by specific interest groups which not only determine local development priorities, but also set normative standards regarding order, decency and appropriate behaviour. These discriminate against the poor and homeless, who are overwhelmingly black, and sometimes lead to their removal.

Even mobilisation around the common interest of crime prevention fails to result in a more integrated community structure. The Community Police Forum (CPF) is dominated by the white middle class, and 'genuine efforts' to integrate other population groups have not been very successful. In any case, race is a factor because the CPF is overwhelmingly white and the police are mostly black, the racial division between the two structures becoming problematic through racialised perceptions of crime. Meanwhile, alternatives to public schooling, now formally integrated, have become increasingly available, resulting in a steady drift of the middle class to private schools. This has a marked impact upon neighbourhood sociability, first, because middle-class engagement with public education is dissipated and transferred to the private arena; and second, because the local private schools draw many of their pupils from outside the area.

Amidst this dispiriting picture, the institutions of faith offer a welcome contrast and spaces where the different population groups meet. They provide support and guidance to those struggling with the rapid pace of South Africa's transition; religious principles and values are common denominators for people of different racial and socio-economic backgrounds; levels of conflict are low, religion unifies more than it divides, and the level of social capital is high. Against this, however, although they engage with questions of inequality and reconciliation, the faith institutions do not contribute to structural

changes or comprehensive transformation.[4] Clerics of the institutions included in Scheidegger's study neither spoke out nor confronted the state about issues of injustice and inequality, but rather opted for charity on grounds of moral obligation towards the less fortunate. Overall, therefore, the faith institutions confirmed her conclusion that, in a context of local disorder and upheaval, it is more privileged individuals, groups, organisations and networks which, while claiming to represent the interests of the entire community, wield disproportionate influence, whereas the poor lack voice and their own social movements to further their interests (Scheidegger 2015).

Change in Johannesburg's outer, newer, northern suburbs

Mabin pursues a similar argument by exploring the transformations which have taken place in Johannesburg's northern suburbs, which began to expand rapidly from the 1950s as the road system expanded and farming land was sold off for development.

Under apartheid, these new suburbs were officially designated as white. However, in practice, they were never exclusively 'white', as space was made for black domestics, other workers and sojourners to reside in back yards, small rooms and 'locations in the sky' above apartment buildings by white employers. Although censuses indicated high white to black ratios, these failed to take in to account the illegality of much black presence (Mabin 2014).

Mabin outlines a dizzying pace of suburban growth from the 1970s and 1980s. This included the conversion of vast tracts of land north of Johannesburg producing new possibilities for commercial development; the expansion of shopping centres, many effectively inaccessible to those without private cars; a relaxation of planning restrictions; and the development of high-rise buildings as a move of business from the central city led to the development of a second CBD in Sandton. Then, as the twentieth century drew to a close, two new and intertwined social changes gave a new feel to northern suburbia. One was the rapid growth in the number of black people with the wherewithal to buy into suburban communities, although as far as the northern suburbs were concerned, the absolute number of black property owners remained relatively small. The other was the construction of large numbers of housing units in new medium-density forms, both in and adjacent to the suburbs.

Hence arose new forms of suburbia: the 'townhouse complex', clustered houses or 'grouped housing'. From these it was a short step to 'gated communities', privately owned walled areas of housing containing hundreds of new houses and dwellings. In turn, the model promoted by these new gated suburbs was copied by many established areas, which retrofitted gates and new fencing around their immediate environs. While these were purportedly designed to reduce crime and increase security, they also served to reduce traffic flow and noise by displacing them to other neighbourhoods. Furthermore, many such areas are increasingly becoming places of work as well as of residence and entertainment. Many are completely new, and 'in some cases increasingly mixed by races, and remarkably diverse' (Mabin 2014, 410), even if as they expand to demographically different areas they are generally further away from the townships. Indeed, it is the newer suburbs to which many economically rising black people are attracted rather than older established ones, even while these undergo gentrification. With dispersion of upper-income consumption and work opportunities to the northern

suburbs, 'so the shift to class rather than race segregation sees not simply a replacement of colours within an older social geography but an entirely new pattern of middle class blacks taking up residence in townhouse complexes which can scarcely be completed fast enough to satisfy the demand' (Mabin 2014, 412–13).

Much of the literature dealing with these varied and complex transformations portrays the rise of physical and social barriers in suburbia as psychic or cultural withdrawal from the new South Africa. For instance, Brian du Toit refers to migration by Afrikaners into such spaces as akin to a new trek, whereby unsettled Afrikaner 'inward migrants' are searching for their own imagined 'white dominions' where the apartheid principles of ethnic exclusivity can be reactivated (du Toit 2003). Christie van der Westhuizen has described this as 'Afrikaner enclave nationalism' which, rather than seeking statehood, is pursuing cultural, social and economic autonomy within smaller locales. Surrounded by blackness, 'embattled Afrikaner identity' increasingly assumes a racial character, as 'being white' becomes 'more important than ethnicity', a finding she arrives at after a study of two 'Afrikaans spaces' in metropolitan areas. One was Durbanville, an upper middle-class area in the predominantly Afrikaans northern suburbs in Cape Town; the other was Centurion, a middle-class-to-affluent area positioned in the suburban sprawl between Johannesburg and Tshwane (Pretoria). The more Afrikaners withdraw from shared national spaces, the more they whiten their own spaces which they create in suburbia, 'taking the form of a privatised micro-apartheid in sites ranging from homes, hair salons, churches and restaurants to whole suburbs' (van der Westhuizen 2016, 191) Even when African, Indian or coloured people buy their way into such suburban domains, reasons are found to exclude them from Afrikaans 'warmth'. Even if middle class, they are not invited into Afrikaners' lives, although this may be verbalised as a matter of regret. Ultimately, 'neither Afrikaansness nor class' qualifies them for whiteness, not least because it is asserted that black Afrikaans speakers do not have the same emotional attachment to the Afrikaans language as their white counterparts (van der Westhuizen 2016).

Although the idea of 'enclave nationalism' captures an important aspect of what Dilip Menon (amongst others) has labelled 'living together separately in South Africa' (Menon 2013, 1), it describes only one dimension of the rapid changes that are taking place in suburbia. More fundamental is the rise of sectional-title estate, an innovation in the rights of private property, whereby individual property rights are exercised in and through a system of collective control and management. As demonstrated by Ivor Chipkin, sectional title as implemented through condominiums, is increasingly characteristic of the gated communities and townhouse complexes which are spreading rapidly throughout South African suburbia, most dramatically in Johannesburg and other parts of Gauteng, where perhaps as many as 2 million people (or 18 per cent of the provincial population) may now live under this form of regime. Sectional title facilitates a mode of 'living together separately' which enables residents of such communities to negotiate diverse and complex histories of family, community, of race, of gender in their own space and in an environment that enables them not to have to fall upon each other (Chipkin 2013).

Sectional title first became possible in South Africa in 1971, but only gained momentum after passage of a Sectional Title Act in 1986 which cleared up ambiguities in earlier legislation. The Act provides for the 'division of buildings into sections and common property and for the acquisition of separate ownership in sections coupled with joint

ownership in common property.' In essence, sectional title living is a way of exercising private ownership of a house or flat while sharing the costs of maintenance and of communal infrastructure (such as gardens, clubhouses, swimming pools and security). If the values of the units in the complex increase, the benefits accrue individually. However, to manage the risk of conflicting preferences and actions of co-owners (so that, for instance, some owners do not under-invest or invest in their properties in a way which imposes costs on their co-owners), the law imposes a legal obligation on co-owners to make decisions communally – that is, through 'the body corporate'. Such communities are therefore unlike traditional suburbs in a highly distinctive manner. Whereas in the latter, homeowners relate to the municipality as separate individuals in a bilateral relationship with the city, the condominium brings about a new kind of social contract. On the one hand, there is a collectivisation of individuals and households; on the other hand, there are multiple contracts between the collective and sometimes the municipality, sometimes simply other complexes, and very often, a myriad of private companies offering traditional state services (such as policing, bulk services and road maintenance).

By offering large houses on their own stands, not separated by fences, and spaces where inhabitants can enjoy physical safety, the most luxurious and wealthy of the townhouse estates (or 'security villages') (Landman 2002) seek to re-create an idealised version of the South African garden suburbs of the 1960s. 'They are places of idealised domesticity where children are free to roam and explore in safety' (Chipkin 2013, 236), their very artificiality – their walls and fences, their surveillance cameras and their regular armed patrols – seeming to facilitate a more natural life, where family and community relationships are unmediated by fear. Simultaneously, because the wealth required to access their lifestyle is considerable, few blacks join in, and by default if not by design they are overwhelmingly 'white spaces'.

In contrast, the average townhouse developments are racially mixed, and while seemingly promising the cross-racial community and cosmopolitanism which was once to be found in places like Sophiatown (Hart and Pirie 1984), they are deliberately and distinctively unlike the township. Far more affordable than the luxury estates, they tend to attract young South Africans with little capital yet who are in formal employment, and if they are black, are seeking to leave the suburbs or townships they grew up in in favour of more *modern* settlements. They are setting out on the road of what Chipkin (2013) refers to as *middle-classing*.

Often located alongside or close to major arterial roads and having convenient access to shopping malls and warehouse shops mostly dedicated to home improvement, such 'cluster' developments enclose multiple complexes comprising numerous housing units, varying in size, and occupied by both owner-occupiers and tenants (of other owners).[5] Furthermore, if the residential composition of the two complexes Chipkin is reporting on (in Roodepoort, on the western edge of the Witwatersrand) is representative, they are remarkably diverse.

Almost half of the units of the Roodepoort complexes were occupied by black families; there was an extravagant mix of nationalities and languages (English, Afrikaans, Portuguese, Xhosa, Zulu, Tswana, Ndebele and Hausa); there were nuclear couples and single women living alone or with friends; there were openly gay couples; and there were Muslims, Christians and Hindus. Seemingly, therefore, the Roodeport complexes

were home to the Rainbow nation. Paradoxically, however, their most widespread and remarkable characteristic was their lack of sociability.

Residents had very little contact with each other; they respected unwritten 'boundaries'; they did not mix together socially; some felt distinctly isolated; and meanwhile all were subject to a remarkably strict set of rules laid down by the body corporate. Nonetheless, for all that many residents found the regulation by the body corporate annoying, they were simultaneously gratified that it maintained order and provided a safe living environment. Many were looking less for community than for privacy, and as far as many black residents were concerned, their complex offered an escape from the obligation to family, an escape for the constant appeals for payment of 'black tax'. While they were seeking to achieve a middle-class standard of living, with all the material and lifestyle choices that that implies, they were simultaneously embedded in networks of solidarity and responsibility to parents, siblings and their wider families. 'These townhouse complexes are thus key elements in the long process of becoming middle class' (Chipkin 2013, 244). Offering quietude and 'respectability', they signal that black residents have left the noisy and chaotic life characteristic of township and working-class life behind.

For those looking forward towards non-racialism, these complexes are clearly awkward terrain.

Becoming white? Coloured movement into Ruyterwacht, Cape Town

Established in the late 1930s by an Afrikaner controlled Citizens' Housing League, the suburb of Ruyterwacht in Cape Town was dedicated to improving the housing of poor Afrikaners and enabling them to live a (lower) middle-class lifestyle. When change came in 1994, it represented a major threat. No longer could they expect support from government, as they were better off than most South Africans, and many of the official support systems, such as child maintenance grants, that had previously helped them were terminated. Furthermore, although the League had given its white residents the chance to buy their houses cheaply in 1991 when it had ended its colour bar, many had by then become increasingly impoverished by the steady withdrawal of state subsidies to whites. Some had already found that they were unable to pay mortgages on their houses, forcing their sale to affluent coloureds who were now moving into the area and were attracted by the low housing prices. Although some who sold managed to move upwards into more solidly white middle-class areas, others simply dispersed into caravan parks, coloured suburbs and even African areas on the Cape Flats.

By 2000, 40 per cent of the suburb's inhabitants were coloureds many of whom held office jobs, had bought their own homes, and were busy climbing the ladder to positions previously denied to them. Most of the new coloured residents were young with small children and were better educated and had higher incomes than most of the existing white residents (Jung and Seekings 1997). White reaction was not wholly negative. Although some whites resented what they perceived to be a coloured invasion of their territory, others appreciated the middle-class lifestyle of the incoming coloureds and thought it good for the area. Indeed, this provided a basis for shared common interest across racial lines. For all that a Community Forum was led by a handful of whites which voiced mainly white concerns, both white and coloured middle-class residents were prone to take action against, for instance, coloured would-be squatters. Likewise,

there was little sympathy extended by either community towards the increasing number of white beggars.

For many whites, – even those determined to maintain 'respectability' – poor whites symbolised a danger of downward mobility which could befall any of them, for although not all whites in the area were poor and not all coloureds were middle class, there was a sense that the latter were materially better off. Nonetheless, the social changes that had come about – such as the shift of congregations from the Dutch Reformed Church to the up and coming apostolic and Pentecostal churches – had not yet collapsed what it meant to be a 'good white'.[6] But the irony was that it was no longer just whites who were pursuing this dream, it was coloureds too, and often doing so in a far better way than the whites themselves. The latter felt themselves to have become even lower-class citizens than they were before and increasingly at the mercy of a black government which threatened their livelihoods (Teppo 2004).

Suburbia and the middle class in South Africa: troubled prospects for non-racialism

Elsewhere in this special issue, Marian Buchardt poses the important question of 'why the middle class fail to support South Africa's "rebellion of the poor"'? One answer lies in the continuing high extent of *de facto* racial residential segregation, and the vast gap in services enjoyed by suburbia and the impoverished residential areas of South Africa. It is only when this gap is breached that residents in differently advantaged areas are likely to develop shared solutions to mutually experienced problems.

Prior to democratisation in 1994, governments had determined that public space should be racially segregated, and the races kept apart in so far as the demands of the economy did not require black labour in white areas. Although this strict division of space was beginning to break down towards the latter years of apartheid, as barriers against black movement into urban areas gave way or ultimately, were relaxed, the legacy of segregation remains. Overwhelmingly, South Africa's population remains physically located in the areas allocated to them historically. Simultaneously, however, segregation is slowly giving way, its defences breached by ever-increasing black migration into South Africa's towns and cities, and black migration *within* cities, resulting in increasing penetration of black people into what were previously predominantly white spaces. Although, as a wide range of work insists, this is a highly complex and multi-faceted phenomenon, it points to major changes in the shaping and racial character of suburbia and an overall increase in interracial contact as an accompaniment of increased urbanisation (Crankshaw 2016).

To put the point most obviously and crudely, those overwhelmingly rural areas which formerly comprised the Bantustans remain almost wholly African (and indeed, are subject to a very different form of governance under 'traditional leaders' and chiefs). Likewise, the 'townships' which grew up outside white urban areas and small towns to service industry may be expanding fast, yet again, they remain overwhelmingly black (or coloured). Whites continue to stay out of and rarely visit them, as was the case under apartheid. Consequently, where residential desegregation is occurring, it is overwhelmingly in inner cities and suburbia. It is in these latter areas, but most particularly in the suburbs where the middle class meets, that the potential for non-racial mixing and social solidarity primarily exists.[7]

As Mabin and many others have testified, inner city areas which were initially 'white' have been transformed by black in-migration and white flight. For instance, the two peri-central neighbourhoods of Yeoville and Bertrams, close to down-town Johannesburg, date back to the early twentieth century and were initially built for relatively low middle-class and working-class white residents, their urban fabric consisting mostly of detached and semi-detached houses. Today, their populations are overwhelmingly poor and black, albeit with Indian, coloured and Afrikaner minorities. Furthermore, both areas are characterised by high levels of residential mobility (a high proportion of their inhabitants having been resident for less than five years) as well as by significant levels of in-migration from other African countries. Overall, in these former white suburbs, in 2001 the remnant white populations were no more than 8 per cent of the resident South Africans in Yeoville and 13 per cent of those in Bertrams.

Both neighbourhoods are characterised by a degree of urban decay which has earned them reputations of being slums, no-go zones, and violent, desperately in need of law and order and re-generation (Benit-Gbaffou 2014). Nonetheless, for all that Hillbrow and Bertrams are 'a domain to few want to belong, or in which few are able to establish their roots' (Winkler 2014, 487), both areas possess 'a vibrancy' which is lacking in 'Johannesburg's walled-off northern suburbs and sterile malls' (Nessman 2002, 194). Yet while this suggests that they may be cosmopolitan (or perhaps more realistically, 'Afropolitan'), this seems relatively unlikely territory for non-racialism. They may be socially diverse, yet the tendency of their foreign immigrants to cluster together serves to make them vulnerable to xenophobic attacks which have become a feature of impoverished communities, where resources are few and unequally shared.

This points to suburbia as the potential focal areas where deracialisation may transform into non-racialism – a genuine dissolution of racial barriers with resultant social mixing and solidarity between the components of South Africa's 'rainbow'.[8] There are some indications that this is taking place where people of different backgrounds recognise that they share common problems, usually in connection with poor service delivery by municipalities, and take action together across lines of race and class to confront them.[9] However, as demonstrated by the analysis above, there are many obstacles standing in the way of any genuine realisation of non-racialism, even if this is merely the pursuit of joint actions by middle-class civic and bottom-up social movements rather that genuine inter-racial solidarity.

In numerous historically white communities, when black people (of whatever class) move in, there is often a pervasive fear of the other, not unusually tinged with resentment; such defensive reactions lead to community representative bodies being captured by white interests; many whites, perhaps especially Afrikaners, withdraw physically or psychically into gated or cultural enclaves. Even in housing complexes, which can be racially and culturally very diverse, the residents seem to live separately together.

This points to a very complicated picture. A careful discussion of the varied survey work on the extent of 'racial reconciliation' which has taken place since 1994 points to a complicated mix of positive and negative outcomes. Some of its conclusions are worth citing. First, there is still not a great deal of inter-racial contact; second, there is almost complete racial/class isolation among the most disadvantaged South Africans, due to the geographical isolation of townships and homelands, as well as the extent of unemployment among them; third, among the dominant elites, where contact is available and positive (as

on university campuses), the dominant outcome is persistent informal segregation; and fourth, survey work suggests that while contact between races has somewhat increased, and there has been a decrease in mistrust across racial categories, there is no great desire for greater cross-racial contact (Foster and Wale 2016, 83).

These rather dismal conclusions do not contradict the overall suggestion of this article – that it is in suburbia, where white and black are more likely to live alongside each other, and share problems, that non-racialism is most likely to be forged. But they do suggest that non-racialism in South Africa remains an enigma, and that the country still has a long way to go if it is to become a more harmonious society.

Notes

1. Many African people today choose to identify as 'black', but here is use 'black' in the inclusive sense, as incorporating people historically designated as African, Coloured and Indian. Where I need to disaggregate these terms, I do so.
2. It is always important to remember that some among the middle classes who could afford to 'move upwards' prefer to stay in 'their own' historically designated areas, where they feel 'at home'. See for instance Ross (2005).
3. For exploration of one of these exceptions, see Public Affairs Research Institute for the Ahmed Kathrada Foundation (2012). This explores how Indian and coloured families in Lehae and white families in Chief Mogale (RDP housing projects) came to be included in the allocation of RDP housing, and how they were pushed to rethink their relationships to their racial identities and to the identities of those around them.
4. Much work needs to be done on racial mixing within churches, especially amongst the charismatic churches which are increasingly popular amongst young people, black and white. But note Marthe Hesselmans' (2019) observation that even by 2019, South Africans still pray mostly within their own communities, not because God tells them to, but because 'all week we are dealing with diversity. On Sunday we want a break'.
5. I suspect that, similarly, such complexes also have access to the Pentecostal churches, which are an increasing feature of the urban landscape.
6. Research has indicated that most churches continue to reflect South Africa's continuing racial segregation, and that where there is a racial mix, external factors such as demographic changes, are often the key factor in bringing about change (Venter 2002).
7. Note, however, that this points to the paucity of work which deals with what is going on in South Africa's numerous small towns where diverse races and classes are compelled by close proximity to rub shoulders together. One of the few studies available, by Doreen Atkinson (2018), points to the growing social diversification of small towns in the Karoo. Although she does not discuss changing residential patterns, her work provides a reminder that 'suburbia' exists not only in the large urban areas but also in small town South Africa.
8. I would have liked to have cited research here that indicates that, although still rare, inter-racial marriages are increasing and taking place largely in suburbia. Alas, the issue is complicated by 'inter-racial' marriage, if extending beyond all-inclusive black and white, entails 12 different combinations (e.g., coloured to white, black African or Indian). See Jacobsen, Amoateng, and Heaton (2004). What we do know, with greater certainty, however, is that transracial adoption is becoming more common, although this overwhelmingly adoption of black babies by white parents, and again, this almost certainly a primarily suburban phenomenon.
9. There is a growing number of media reports of citizens from different communities working together to tackle shared problems of service delivery by failing municipalities. See for instance, Philip Machanik (2020); Bega and M&G Data Desk (2021).

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