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HISTORICALLY DIVIDED CITIES – URBAN HERITAGE OF THE APARTHEID ERA

1. INTRODUCTION

The apartheid city in South Africa was created as a result of enormous government intervention and expenditure, which was spread over several decades. It introduced urban segregation, based mostly on race differences and supported by racial zoning laws. Demarcation of racial residential zones became a central component of the city planners especially after imposition of the apartheid policy upon South African urban areas combined with the National Party electoral victory in 1948. This event led to deep changes in spatial planning of cities and urban population distribution.

The imposition of the apartheid upon the South African society was one of the major social experiments of the twentieth century. Its aim was to preserve White political and economic domination over the country through segregation of the South African population at every possible level. Urban areas were of key importance here as cities, where various races were socially and economically mixed, were seen as a potential hazard to the established order. Therefore the objective was to zone urban areas and mark out exclusive residential spheres for all officially defined racial groups (Christopher, 1997).

2. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND DEVELOPMENT OF AN APARTHEID CITY

Since the end of the colonial period the transformation of towns and cities in South Africa has been the most outstanding phenomenon hardly found in any other colony or dominion. Although the colonial period formally ended

with the establishment of the Union of South Africa in 1910, and the country left the British Commonwealth in 1961, the coming of the National Party to power (1948) significantly influenced the future form of cities (Western, 1981; Simon, 1989). Together with the National Party electoral victory the former policy of segregationism pursued under successive dominion of governments was superseded by that of apartheid (Christopher, 1991) which strengthened urban racial segregation in South African cities.

However the plan for delimitation of separate residential areas was not a new idea. South Africa, like some other colonial states, adopted racial residential segregation as a central component of urban planning since the earliest stages of urban settlement (Parnell, 2002). The apartheid city had its origins deeply rooted in the colonial period. Therefore one can distinguish three main phases of urban segregation policies which led to creation of the apartheid city in South Africa: pre–1923, 1923–1950, and 1950–1979.

Before 1923 the early forms of urban segregation in South Africa originated from the most rigorous urban labour control. They were represented by fenced compounds for African migrant workers in the developing diamond-mining towns, such as Kimberley and Johannesburg and also by compound-type accommodation for African dockworkers in old trade towns e.g. Cape Town and Durban. This period was also marked by social pressure of White residents, resulting from the fear of plagues and diseases spread by the African workers, which led to establishment of special locations where Africans were brought under sanitary control, e.g. Ndabeni in Cape Town. In Durban segregationist tendencies was directed against Indians rather than Africans which was caused by competition between Indians and Whites for space and trade position. It resulted in discriminatory decisions of local authorities consisting in residential segregation, political exclusion, and commercial suppression.

The second period, between 1923 and 1950, covers the time of significant shift in the South African economy, development of manufacturing sector, dramatic growth of the urban African population and the increasing central state intervention in the sphere of urban policy and practice. The first major state intervention took place in the 1923 together with the Native Urban Areas Act (NUAA). The NUAA contained key elements of subsequent urban apartheid practise in its embryonic form. It empowered municipalities to establish segregated locations for Africans but also recommended and enabled residential segregation. Under the NUAA the appalling and overcrowded African townships were established, which were meant to house, at minimum cost, the migrant "temporary urban sojourners" who

represented a cheap labour (Simon, 1989). It provided a framework and foundation upon which subsequent legislations and policy were implemented, but also set up the planning rules that extended beyond the usual colonial tradition of simply demarcating urban space for indigenous people. The NUAA codified a system of municipal finance and of state involvement in housing provision for African people, and established separate systems of governance for African urban residents. The law was passed nationally but its application was pioneered in Johannesburg, which became a national model for how to entrench the interests of the White elite while advancing the development of an African industrial workforce (Parnell, 2002). By the time that the National Party came to power in 1948, a whole apparatus for regulating and controlling the movement and daily lives of urban Africans had already been constructed, however not yet as efficient as it was designed to.

The final phase (1950–1979) saw a development of patterns established in the second phase and theirs official constitution, but also major changes in the morphology of South African cities. The two major pieces of legislation mark this period, namely the Population Registration Act and the Group Areas Act (1950). The former provided for the classification of the country population into distinct racial groups based on the skin colour, history and language. Three racial groups have been distinguished: European (sub-sequently renamed White), Native (subsequently renamed Bantu, Black, and finally African) and Coloured (further divided into the number of subgroups including Asian (itself subdivided into Indian and Chinese), Cape Malay and Griqua (Christopher, 1997). The Group Areas Act provided for establishment of separate zones in urban areas that should be set aside for exclusive residential and commercial use of each group. It meant that no one could live, own property or conduct business outside the area designated for his/her group (Christopher, 1987). The Group Areas Act made compulsory what the 1923 Urban Area Act (NUAA) had recommended. The principle of residential segregation within the cities was deeply entrenched. Small-scale approach to segregation was replaced by the broader, sectoral plan for cities (Fig. 1) (Davies, 1981). As a consequence, a vision of highly ordered and tightly controlled apartheid city was created. The South African apartheid government imposed and supervised urban racial segregation through four different instruments. First, by hierarchical racial division of the population. Second, by generating spatial segregation based on the land allocation policy and by using physical features such as rivers, roads and railways to isolate the segregated territories. Third, by ensuring that major mineral resources

remain within the areas designated for the Whites. Fourth, by giving different political rights to White and non-White groups of population. Creation of the highly structured apartheid city resulted from the Whites' desire to achieve physical segregation, at first from the African, and consequently from the Indian and the Coloured populations. Therefore racially exclusive and unequal residential areas, with separate educational, health and recreation facilities were designed to minimize interracial contacts.
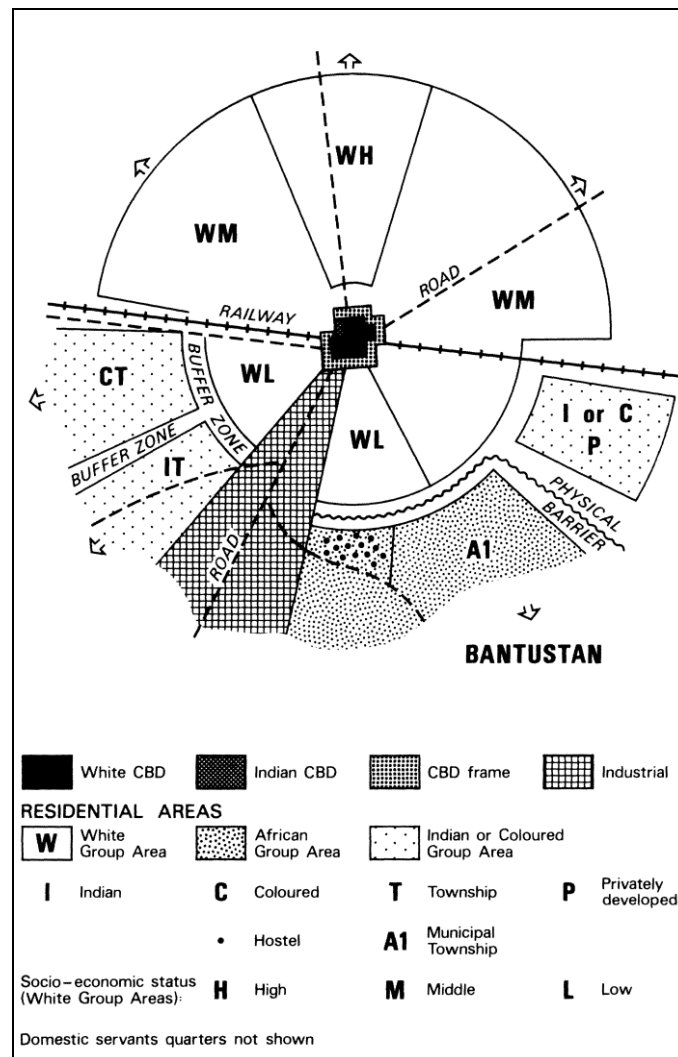
Fig. 1. The original apartheid city model
Source: After Davies (1981)

The urban apartheid policy, anchored by the 1950 Group Areas Act, divided towns and cities into group areas for exclusive occupation by particular racial groups. The areas for various population groups were to be single continuous pieces of land capable to support the defined community and able to extend on the urban periphery as the population grew, without changing the pattern. In this urban structure the conditions of all races mirrored their socio-political positions and class status. White control was obviously paramount. The White group areas were drawn very extensively, so that the three-quarters of the area zoned under these laws were reserved for the White population (Christopher, 2001a). The city centres, the key inner suburbs and other prestigious areas were zoned for the dominant White group. Also the road and railway network were to be under White control. Moreover, land and capital were largely controlled by the Whites, too (Christopher, 1997). Remaining peripheral areas were divided between other racial groups and were territorially restrained. In detailed planning, the group area of one group was separated from another by buffer strip of open land at least 100 meters wide, but preferably by physical barrier such as a railway, escarpment, industrial areas or river, which would impede contact between the two populations.

Between 1950 and 1991 over 1 million hectares of urban land were zoned in racial terms. It created major disparities between groups as to the access to urban land. The sectoral approach resulted in massive action of expropriation of land owned by Coloured, Asian and African population (Christopher, 1997). Vast majority of people were forcibly removed from the areas proclaimed for exclusive White occupation (Christopher, 2001a). The 1950s were largely the period of massive Black displacement and resettlement. It was particularly common in the major industrial cities of Transvaal. Inner Black or mixed suburbs such as Sophiatown in Johannesburg were razed and replaced by new White-occupied areas. Between 1966 and 1985, around 860,400 people, mainly Coloureds and Indians, and only very few Whites, were forcibly relocated within urban areas to create the apartheid cities (Platzky and Walker, 1985). To this number must be also added thousands of Africans and Coloureds uprooted in terms of "slum clearance" and the 1952 Prevention of Illegal Squatting Act (Simon, 1988). Thousands of people were moved in order to "tide up" cities. Segregation levels increased dramatically (Christopher, 1991).

Part of the "grand apartheid" scheme involved building of large, new public estates, required to house the mainly Black workforce and also to accomplish more comprehensive segregation. Terminology was shifted to

reflect the new era, and the term "township" acquired its second and more well-known meaning in the South African planning lexicon: large, segregated public housing estate, usually on or beyond the urban periphery (Mabin and Smit, 1997). According to the apartheid "ideal" these townships were to be situated as far as possible from White residential areas, but reasonably close to industrial areas. Spatial separation was to be reinforced by buffer zones and by natural or other barriers. Townships were to be designed and situated in such a way that they could be cordoned off in the event of riot or rebellion, and the resistance suppressed in open streets. In the 1950s and 1960s construction of such townships in many urban areas proceeded on a considerable scale (Maylam, 1990). In the apartheid era, public housing provision radically increased, e.g. in Johannesburg from an average of 800 houses per year for the period 1900–1950, to an average of 4,000 units per annum. At its peak in 1957/1958 the rate reached 11,074 houses per year (Fig. 2) (Mabin and Smit, 1997).

Fig. 2. Mass public housing in Soweto (1965)
Source: Mabin and Smit (1997)

Not surprisingly increasing segregation and the construction of South African apartheid towns and cities provoked a rising tide of resistance. Opposition movements, however, were banned, political leaders imprisoned and an 'iron fist' of social control put firmly in place. Under these conditions it appeared during the 1960s that a successful urban regime had been created, nearly achieving elimination of shack settlements and continuing building in massive townships (Mabin and Smit, 1997).

The development of racial segregation in South Africa has profoundly affected the form and pattern of urban areas, resulting in the emergence of the apartheid city. The era of apartheid "proved to be a seductive way of seeing the city for many practitioners and planners who were deeply involved in its implementation" (Parnell and Mabin, 1995). However, only few cities were originally planned as apartheid cities. Most of them were founded as colonial cities already with a measure of economic segregation which was reflected in racial terms and in later stage were adopted to demands of an apartheid era (Christopher, 1987).

3. A CASE STUDY OF PORT ELIZABETH

Port Elizabeth, a major city of the Eastern Cape in the Cape Province, provides a fine example of transformation of a colonial city into an apartheid city. It is particularly significant example of remodelling of a city, which in colonial times was already partly segregated. Before 1911 it witnessed the emergence of the "location" system for Black population, which were structurally separated from the main plan of the town and were zoned for exclusive occupation of the Black population. Before the 1950 many residential estates were established for exclusive White occupation, but the greatest changes in spatial racial distribution occurred in the period between 1950 and 1985, converting the Port Elizabeth into a model apartheid city (Fig. 3). The White group areas were drawn in such a manner as to include virtually the entire White population. The Central Business District and the inner suburbs were parts of the White zone and the other groups were relegated to the periphery of the city. A series of new suburbs were built extending nearly 20 kilometres from the city centre. Resettlement resulted in the massive building programmes to house displaced people. Indian and Chinese populations were rehoused in two new areas assigned for them between the White and the Coloured areas. The conversion of Port Elizabeth into an apartheid city was a complex process spread over the entire thirty-five year period (1950–1985). Resettlement was completed in the 1984, when the last of the Coloured municipal housing schemes in Fairview, assigned as the White zone, was evacuated and demolished. The expansion of Port Elizabeth between 1950 and 1985, took place within the framework provided by the apartheid model with its markedly sectoral pattern, which resulted in the major resettlement of the population and physical replanning of the city structure (Christopher, 1987).
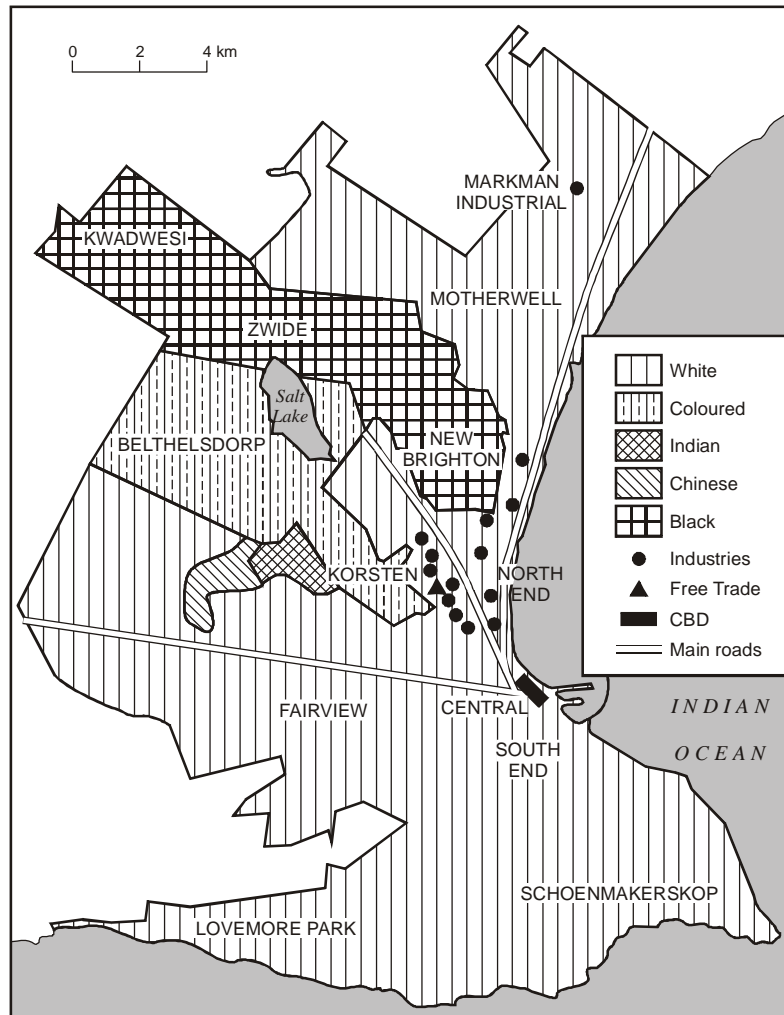
Fig. 3. Generalized Group Area zoning, Port Elizabeth
Source: After Christopher (1987)

4. CONCLUSION: HERITAGE OF THE URBAN APARTHEID IN CONTEMPORARY CITY LANDSCAPE

The urban apartheid system in South Africa reached its peak in the 1960s. However, since the 1980s, weakened by its own contradictions, but also strikes and uprisings of black workers, it has shown signs of breaking down (Maylam, 1990). Its legal foundations were repealed in 1991, however

officially instituted programmes of land restitution and social and economic uplifting did not change or demise the patterns introduced during the last 40 years. After 1991 the residential integration was mostly left to market forces, accompanied by occasional land invasions.

Choice of residential options is still constrained by the general level of poverty especially among Africans, which prevents them from purchasing property in the formerly White areas. The Black majority keeps living in townships, which are characterized by very poor conditions of living, lack of sanitation, social facilities and services. In many cities, outside the townships, beyond the urban fringe informal shack settlements exist, deprived of any township services, and are often erected in areas of geotechnical or political susceptibility. On the other hand white population remains both more segregated and less open to change then the other groups (Christopher, 2001a). Urban segregation levels in South Africa still remains remarkably high by international standards, therefore the heritage of the apartheid planning is still apparent in the urban form (Christopher, 1997).

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