Diversity and Small Town Spaces in Post-Apartheid South Africa: An Introduction

By Melissa Steyn (University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa) and
Richard Ballard (University of Kwazulu-Natal, South Africa)

> 'We may now use the term "spatiality" to capture the ways in which the social and the spatial are inextricably realised one in the other' (Keith and Pile, 1993, p. 6).

South Africa represents an international site of interest on issues of reconciliation and transformation within a historical context of ethnic hostility, racial segregation and dire mismanagement of diversity. Since 1994, the old apartheid political structures including national government, provincial government and local government have been reformed and numerous laws have been enacted to redress past injustices and to facilitate greater economic and social equity. With the 20 years of democracy being celebrated in 2014, this special edition of *Diversities* is pertinent to the many questions that will be raised in taking stock of how far South Africa has come in changing the dynamics of segregation, exclusion and oppression that characterised the old dispensation. In particular, the articles collected in this volume speak to spatiality in small town life as a specific dimension of sociality.

There is a rich body of literature that examines the spatiality of human life, and the ways in which space is an active part of how our social identities come to be constructed. As Foster (2005, p. 498) puts it: 'Space is highly significant for human interaction. [. . .] Places have specific meanings for people; they resonate with symbolic and emotional significance. We all carry with us senses of "place identity".' Indeed, identity and space are not only intimately linked but actively constitute each other.

In its operations of shaping social orders, the spatiality of life is not "innocent". It is deeply inscribed within relations of power, permeated by politics and ideology, and implicated in both articulating and hiding this imbrication (Keith and Pile, 1993). This was certainly true of apartheid South Africa, which sought to establish "group areas" and "homeland" arrangements that were presented as aspirational processes of "separate development". One of the ways in which such ideological manoeuvres become bedded down is through the formation of a moral order. Mbembe (2004) has argued that apartheid in South Africa tried to establish a particular moral order through spatial arrangements, the physical distance between races being largely understood to sanctify moral distances.

The spatial manifestations of what is considered right and wrong are evident in the arrangements of neighbourhoods. It is when the social order is disrupted that this moral order, and the cultural assumptions upon which it is based, becomes discernible (Stokoe and Wallwork, 2003). Thus Ballard (2004) shows in his research the discomfort of suburban white people to emerging informal communities in Durban. The "threat" these residents feel resides in increased proximity to those that were previously excluded from suburban spaces, a closeness experienced as destabilising the established social and moral order.

Given South Africa's history, its enforced geographies of separation and subsequent programmes aimed at reversing this legacy, it provides a particularly rich site for social enquiry within the framework of spatiality. In South Africa as elsewhere, much of the emerging literature on space, identity and the social order points to a deeply ethnicised and racialised organisation of space. In those places where actual physical

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proximity has developed between racial groupings since the inception of democracy in South Africa in 1994, it has not necessarily resulted in social proximity. Although this lack of social integration is cloaked in numerous guises such as property price, crime, disease, culture and spoiling of the natural environment (Saff, 1996*a*, 2001*b*; Steyn, 2004; Steyn and Foster 2008) the single most important underlying theme identified in the literature is race. In his work on squatter communities in Cape Town, Saff (2001, p. 87) explores how "race neutral" objections to squatter communities serve to "camouflage racial prejudice". In their work on perceptions of informal street traders in relation to white middle suburban communities in Durban, Popke and Ballard (2004) also explore the way in which racist meaning is disguised in metaphor. The result of these discursive strains is the entrenchment and persistence of racially organized residential patterns. Dixon and Durrheim (2003), revealing the racialised flows of people on beaches in Kwa Zulu-Natal, yet again emphasise how these racially segregationist dynamics are informed by a moral foundation that justifies the place of different racial groups in relation to each other.

Nevertheless, much has changed in South Africa, and this surely does also apply to attitudes towards difference and otherness. Current attitudes to social difference are not simply reducible to apartheid-like racism (Nuttall 2009, Durrheim et al 2010). With democracy, the country opened up to the international world and the influences and pressures of globalisation once sanctions and international isolation were lifted. There have been flows of people from, to, and within the country. Class relations have changed to the extent that there is now a burgeoning black middle class. A good deal of the work tracking changes in relation to space and identity in a changing South Africa is being done in relation to South African cities. In 2004 Sarah Nuttall and Achille Mbembe edited a volume of *Public Culture* on Johannesburg and the way in which identity is articulated through the space of the city. Recently, Murray et al. (2007) produced a collection of chapters exploring identity as expressed in and through memory and spaces in Cape Town. This work reflects a mixed record in terms of the transformation of identities and the interaction of people and spaces. It is clear that the demise of formal measures of racial segregation previously enforced by apartheid has not resulted in an unproblematically integrated and egalitarian society. South Africa remains a deeply divided society, and even as the fault lines shift and reconfigure, some scholars argue that 'the spatial distribution of housing and communities in cities and towns, remains relatively unchanged other than in limited areas' (Foster, 2005, p. 494). Christopher (2005, p. 2305) observes that 'the post-apartheid city continues to look remarkably like its predecessor, the apartheid city'.

Countering the trend which has seen research on transformation in South Africa mostly focussed on life in urban areas, the research programme that led the articles in this special edition[1] sought to investigate transformation, especially as it relates to spatiality, in rural towns in South Africa. With a few exceptions, such as Donaldson and Marais (2012), rural areas have not received the same attention as cities. Apart from the simple fact of the concentration of people and economic activity in the cities, a reason for the lack of research on transformation in towns may lie in the way in which rural areas are positioned within the imagined community of the nation. The spatial distance between the non-white population groups and the white minority population which characterised apartheid was premised upon an imagined nation comprised of a white body politic, in which the state apparatus aimed to protect whiteness and white privilege. Currently, within the post-apartheid period, one can see how the discursive construction of small towns as being somewhat stuck in the apartheid past promotes the idea that it is the non-rural areas which have been allegedly transformed into "Rainbow" spaces.

One of the studies conducted as part of the broader research programme (Goredema, 2009)

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analysed one hundred and fifty-six news reports on five South African small towns in national print media database. The study showed how the small town provides the South African imagination with a convenient "other" on which racism, the most undesirable characteristic associated with the post-apartheid country, can be projected. The analysis revealed that small towns are positioned as the "internal other" (who is easily contained and controlled) as a way of coping with the threat posed by racism to the new national identity. This allows for the imagination of a new South Africa that is tied to new values, whilst the old values are relegated to – but kept under close lock and key – the basement of the South African small town.

Small towns offer an interesting site for the analysis of spatiality and identity because people are "thrown together" more intimately, and there is less room for "escape" from "others" than in bigger towns or cities. In these environments one can expect the difference between formal institutional changes and lived reality to be more visible and tangible than in urban areas, where life is lived more anonymously. Our research programme set out to examine how diversity within these towns may or may not reflect political changes, and may or may not reveal dynamics that are different from or more accentuated than those present in their more studied city counterparts. Collectively, the case studies revealed some of the informal mechanisms through which diversity is being organized in these towns.

Four of the case studies conducted in the programme are brought together in this special edition. Reflecting geographic, class, linguistic and ethnic diversity, each study shows a community within a town responding to a different sense of internal threat created by changes within their original context. Our original study had been hopeful of finding instructive ways in which the characteristics of small towns lent themselves to 'being different together' (Steyn, 2010). These four studies, however, rather echo Falah's (1996) observations about how people living in close proximity and sharing the same social space manage to maintain intergroup boundaries even in the absence of legal policies of segregation, 'living together apart'. We show the continuing underlying racial dynamics within some communities of (relative) racial privilege. Despite being very differently positioned as communities, in all these milieus social operations function to retain or reconfigure relative racial entitlement, racially inflected self-positionings of respectability, or the (now perceived to be flouted) racial wage.

The ability of people to sustain and reproduce themselves is fundamental to the production of social identities. Smaller towns often develop on the basis of a limited range of economic sectors whose fortune determines the very viability of life in the town. As the article in this special edition by Peens and Dubbeld shows, the evaporation of gainful employment in Newcastle in the KwaZulu-Natal province has changed the way in which working class whiteness is reproduced. Poor whites have, within the 20th century South African social experiment, been understood as failed whites of questionable moral status. Through hard work they could redeem themselves, something that was possible during periods of economic growth which benefited white employees. In this town the restructuring in the steel industry and deindustrialization resulted in enormous job losses. Church-based welfare organisations provide support to poor whites left stranded by these economic forces. But rather than recognise the role of changing economic structures, the deterioration in their fortunes is attributed to moral deficiency and the state's perceived prioritisation of black people within post-apartheid systems of employment equity.

The concern for economic decline plays itself out differently in the picturesque small "hamlet" of Prince Albert, situated in the Karoo area of Western Cape province. In contrast to the apparent reversal of racial locations recounted by the poor white people of Newcastle, Prince Albert is seen as a haven for a "creative class" of mostly retired, middle-class, white, English speaking residents who have relocated to the country from urban areas. McEwen sees this as a variety of "semigration", in which people migrate within South Africa to escape some aspects of life, par-

ticularly those in urban settings. The incomers position the quaint heritage of the town, which they preserve, and the heritage tourism, which they drive, as the industries that can retain economic viability for the town -- also to the benefit of the historically poor 'coloured' population who inhabit the economically deprived neighbourhood of Prince Albert. McEwen argues that her study shows how, on the contrary, these apparently romantic industries can also be used to perpetuate the social stratification created during the eras of colonialism and apartheid.

Besharati and Foster deal with a different migration pattern affecting a small town, the broadly 'Afrikaans' town of Mokopane (formerly Potgietersrus) in the northern province of South Africa, Limpopo. Indian identified people have long dominated trade in this town, though the 1950s Group Areas Act (the segregationist legislation of apartheid) ensured that they lived in the segregated suburb of Akasia. This delimited belonging, attached to racially specific zoning, largely continues today. Residents argue that despite the superficial politeness they experience, they are ultimately unwelcome in the town and prefer to keep to themselves in Akasia. In the post-apartheid period, there has been an injection of Pakistani migrants and many have taken up residence in Akasia. However, established Indian people have not identified easily with new arrivals. The result is a minority's minority: as Indian minorities have to manage a relationship to their dominant Afrikaans hosts, so they in turn assume a dominant position towards Pakistani immigrants. The group whose attachment to the town is marginal is itself questioning the belonging of incoming populations.

Pillay and Durrheim show how small towns, themselves, have place identities in as much as residents or outsiders ascribe characters to them. Swartruggens, a town in the North West province, gained notoriety as a site of untransformed, residual apartheid conservatism following the shooting of residents of a shack settlement, Skierlik, by a white man shouting racist abuse. Pillay and Durrheim point out that 'the ensuing public discourse assumed that it was a clear expression of racism' and their interest is therefore in unpacking the secondary identity work in the "person/place knot" following the shooting. In their narratives, white residents of the town manage the stigma attached to belonging to the town through claiming not to recognise themselves and their community in the disgraceful event. As they attempt to deflect the shameful association of racism with their town, they present their community as decent, safe and tight knit. In this way, the identity of the town is redeemed, and restored to an apparently pre-Skierlik respectability.

The full set of studies in the research programme, nine in total, reveals a fascinating, layered picture of post-apartheid rural small town life. This sample illustrates how alterations in the flows of people and fortunes, and events occasioned by political, economic and social shifts, reveal both continuities and disruptions with the old, racialised patterns of the society. Studied in this way, the towns also provided a useful lens on social dynamics of diversity operating in the larger national arena.

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Note on the Authors

Melissa Steyn holds the DST-NRF South African National Research Chair in Critical Diversity Studies and is the founding Director of the Wits Centre for Diversity Studies. Her book on whiteness in post-apartheid South Africa, *Whiteness just isn't what is used to be: White identity in a changing South Africa* (2001, State University of New York Press) won the 2002 outstanding scholarship award from the National Communication Association (USA) in International and Intercultural Communication.

Richard Ballard is an Associate Professor in the school of Built Environment and Development Studies, University of KwaZulu-Natal. He completed a Ph.D. in Geography at Swansea (UK) on whiteness and urban desegregation after apartheid in 2002. He publishes on race and urban desegregation, democracy and social movements.