Mixed-Race Residential Areas in South African Cities - Urban Geographical Developments in the Late and Post-Apartheid Phases

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ABSTRACT: Even before the definite scrapping of the Group Areas Act in July 1991, mixed racial residential areas developed in South African cities. Against the Apartheid laws, this mainly occurred in central areas of the cities, which the white population had left during the process of suburbanization. Thus the moving of non-white, middle-class population groups into these areas became possible (so-called grey areas).

The objective of this paper is to present and analyse one example for this development from the Johannesburg area. The following questions are examined by own investigations: the process of immigration and the succession of different groups of immigrants; the demographic and social characteristics of the inhabitants, esp. in comparison to the white population; small-scale concentration of different ethnic groups; conflicts between whites and non-whites; the consequences of the ethnic changes on neighbouring residential areas. The results lead to several hypotheses concerning the future development of South African cities.

Introduction and Objectives

In the course of the political reform process the legal pillars of Apartheid were eliminated in 1990 and 1991. Special mention should be made of the Group Areas Act, which went out of force on 1 July 1991. Already before that, however, it has had only limited validity and has been applied rather laxly (Elder 1990; Jürgens 1991; Christopher 1992). This law regulated the separate use of residential and business districts by the different racial groups and went back to traditions from the pre-Apartheid phase. It was undoubtedly the most important regulation associated with the reality of Apartheid. The repeal of the Group Areas Act was a particularly important turning point, especially for the mentality of many whites. All over the country persons of all skin colors could now acquire property and settle anywhere, providing their personal income allowed them to do so. In the following we shall analyze the phase of upheaval before and after the repeal of the Group Areas Act. This we shall do in depth for Yeoville, a residential area in Johannesburg, for which empirical data from the years 1989 and 1991 are available from two different sources (Jürgens 1991; Human Sciences Research Council 1992). We shall describe the socioeconomic and demographic conditions of the inhabitants, their places of origin and their motives for moving into the area and we shall investigate whether there has been a tendency toward segregation of non-whites in previously "white" residential areas.

The Development of Grey Areas up to 1991

Although looked down upon by the majority of the white population, mixed-race residential areas existed from the end of the 19th century on, when large cities began to develop (Pinnock 1980; Van Onselen 1982 a and b; Swanson 1983; Christopher 1988). Legal regulations were supposed to prevent this situation, but until the implementation of Apartheid in 1948 they were applied rather ,,laxly". This laissez-faire phase ended with the Group Areas Act of 1950 and the establishment of a comprehensive administrative and police apparatus to enforce it (Eiselen 1948; Barker 1949). Deliberate, forced dispersal of existing mixed-race residential areas (forced removal) and influx control measures designed to prevent new mixed-race areas from developing were now applied with the aim of creating homogeneous residential areas inhabited by only one population group (Platzky and Walker 1985). Nevertheless, since the mid-1970s
government offices have been less and less able to enforce the Group Areas Act.

In the course of a kind of informal desegregation arising from the influx of non-whites into residential areas that were officially proclaimed "white", so-called grey areas developed. They first appeared in areas in and close to the downtown parts of Johannesburg and Durban (DCRA 1987; Fick and De Coning 1989; Bähr and Jürgens 1990) (Fig 1). This development soon took on such dimensions that only very arbitrary intervention by the police was possible for violations against the Group Areas Act. Otherwise "new" mixed-race areas had to be tacitly tolerated. This became more and more necessary because it was no longer possible for the government to deal with the objective reasons leading to the influx of non-whites within the framework of the Apartheid ideology. In areas reserved for non-whites there was a housing shortage, while housing units remained empty in "white" areas (de Vos 1986). In the townships there was a great deal of politically motivated unrest. Especially important, a non-white middle class had grown up whose members expected a higher standard of living (Dreyer 1989; Star 10 March 1992). For all of these reasons more and more persons dared to take on the risk of an illegal residential status. As a rule such persons were dependent on the practices of white property owners who were looking for new - non-white - clients in the flatlands of the "white" inner city areas, in defiance of the existing laws (Cloete 1991).

In the 1970s and increasingly in the 1980s, many white families moved out into the suburbs, more people emigrated and impoverished white persons resorted to the practice of rent-sharing (Saturday Star 23 February 1991). As a result there were more and more empty apartments in and near the downtown areas, for which no white occupants could be found. Economic considerations on the part of the landlords were thus an important reason for violating the Group Areas Act. Because for a long time the risk of being prosecuted and punished was shared quite unevenly by landlords and tenants – the landlord was fined, the tenant lost his apartment and was punished (Dodson 1990) – in some cases house owners were able to demand usurious rents. High occupation densities tended to contribute to the deterioration of the apartments.

In the 1970s it was initially well-to-do coloureds and Indians who appeared as renters and purchasers in the white residential areas (with the help of white nominees) and who initiated the process of "greying" (de Coning 1986). Almost half of the persons who found housing in the downtown areas of Johannesburg at the end of the 1970s came to work in Johannesburg from Cape Town, Durban and the eastern Cape Region (Pickard-Cambridge 1988). These upwardly mobile persons, who benefited from the relaxation of racial discrimination in the private economic sector, would have been at the bottom of waiting lists had they applied for houses in the townships or, being persons living without family bonds, they would not have been considered for allocated housing. It was not until later that blacks and non-whites of generally lower social status followed, and they did so particularly because of the politically motivated unrest in the black townships in the mid and late 1980s, but also because they knew that the