

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

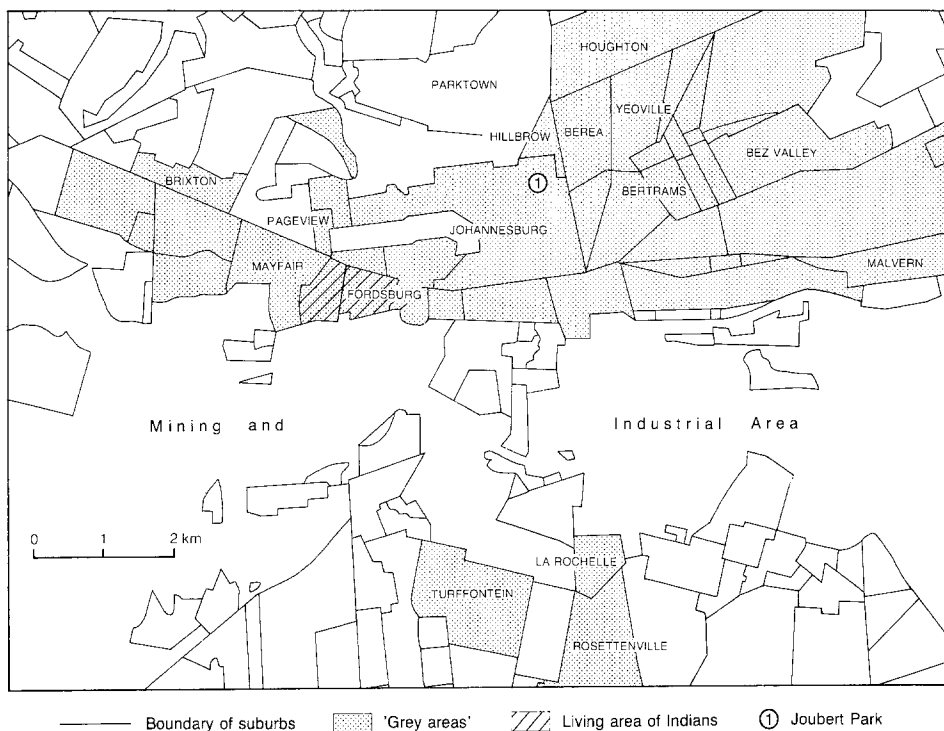


Fig 1
Distribution of grey areas in the
downtown area of Johannesburg,
1989

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

legal practice of forced eviction had been undermined since 1982. In the case *State vs Govender* (le Grange and Goldstone 1986), eg, the verdict had been that forced eviction was possible only if alternative housing could be made available to the affected persons, which was not generally the case.

Though individual mixed-race communities dating to the pre-Apartheid phase continued to exist at the end of the 1980s (eg Woodstock in Cape Town, Warwick Triangle in Durban) (Lemon 1991), the wave of new grey areas was first limited to Johannesburg. This development was concentrated on the CBD itself and in the adjoining areas of Hillbrow, Berea and Yeoville, where the typical buildings are anonymous, unsupervisable high-rise or middle-rise apartment buildings. As a result of the aging of the white inhabitants there and the high spatial mobility of young white persons, the traditionally high proportion of immigrants from overseas and the resultant cosmopolitan image of these areas, non-white in-migration met with only weak political resistance among the white population.

No exact statistical data exist, however. It is assumed that in 1988 up to 100,000 illegal non-whites had found accommodations in conventional housing (ie not including squatters or "people on the pavement") in the "white" areas of Johannesburg (*Financial Mail* 21 October 1988). In no other city (Durban, Cape Town, Port Elizabeth, Pietermaritzburg, Pretoria) did comparable "greying" occur, simply because of the number of available housing units.

The final attempt to control this illegal residential situation by legal means within the framework of Apartheid, by amending the Group Areas Act, resulted in the nation-wide proclamation of 13 free settlement areas in 1990 and 1991 (Bähr and Jürgens 1992; Christopher 1992). In these areas mixed-race living was expressly legalized. The group areas for individual population groups were kept separate from these and were supposed to be protected more effectively against in-migration of disqualified persons (Cloete 1991). The discussion about establishing free settlement areas omitted precisely those areas in which mixed-race living de facto dominated, and they continued to be considered "white" residential areas; hence the concept of "containing" grey areas was unrealistic from its inception (Cloete 1991).

Yeoville as an Example of Mixed-Race Living

Using the residential area of Yeoville in Johannesburg as an example, we shall examine the development toward mixed-race residential areas. In 1989 the author interviewed 420 households (Jürgens 1991). 374 of the households were a random sample of whites; 46 were non-white and mixed-race households, who were approached systematically. In 1991 the Human Sciences Research Council carried out a further investigation on a random sample of households in mixed-race areas in Greater Johannesburg. 65 of the interviews were done in Yeoville (HSRC 1992).

Census	1970	1980	1985	1991
Whites				
male	4 762	4 205	3 339	2 546
female	4 960	4 807	3 951	2 953
non-economic service workers	-	4 128	2 992	-
≤ 14 years	-	308	220	-
Blacks				
male	459	301	261	372
female	1 030	682	617	604
non-economic service workers	15	24	30	-
≤ 14 years	1 412	821	754	-
≤ 14 years	10	13	30	-
Asians				
male	1	16	24	76
female	1	15	22	78
non-economic service workers	-	10	22	-
≤ 14 years	-	2	0	-
≤ 14 years	0	5	22	-
Coloureds				
male	4	7	9	103
female	14	10	19	139
non-economic service workers	-	3	11	-
≤ 14 years	-	4	9	-
≤ 14 years	1	2	5	-
Total male	5 226	4 529	3 633	3 097
female	6 005	5 514	4 609	3 774
Total population	11 231	10 043	8 242	6 871

Source: Republic of South Africa (1970, 1980, 1985, 1991); data for 1991 not adjusted for undercount.

Tab 1 Census results for Yeoville

The Residential District and its Population

The investigated area lies at the northeastern edge of the downtown area of Johannesburg. The earliest records of property sales date to 1890. Originally planned as a "well-to-do suburb", Yeoville lost this status as the city expanded northward in the wake of new transport technologies (electrified trains [Hart 1972]) and developed into a typical middle-class area. Characteristic even today are comparatively small lots on which detached and row houses alternate with rental apartments and condominiums (sectional title flats). Since the 1930s the latter have offered living space "for newcomers and the growing number of transients" (*Sunday Express* 27 May 1984), in the form of one-room apartments (bachelor flats), boarding houses and residential hotels and are thus "the first step in the housing ladder" for the younger strata of the population (*Sunday Express* 27 May 1984).

The development and composition of the population of Yeoville reflects not only the effects of the Group Areas Act, but also the socioeconomic status and religious and job-related peculiarities of its inhabitants. Since it had been proclaimed a white residential area, the only non-whites originally living here were those with official

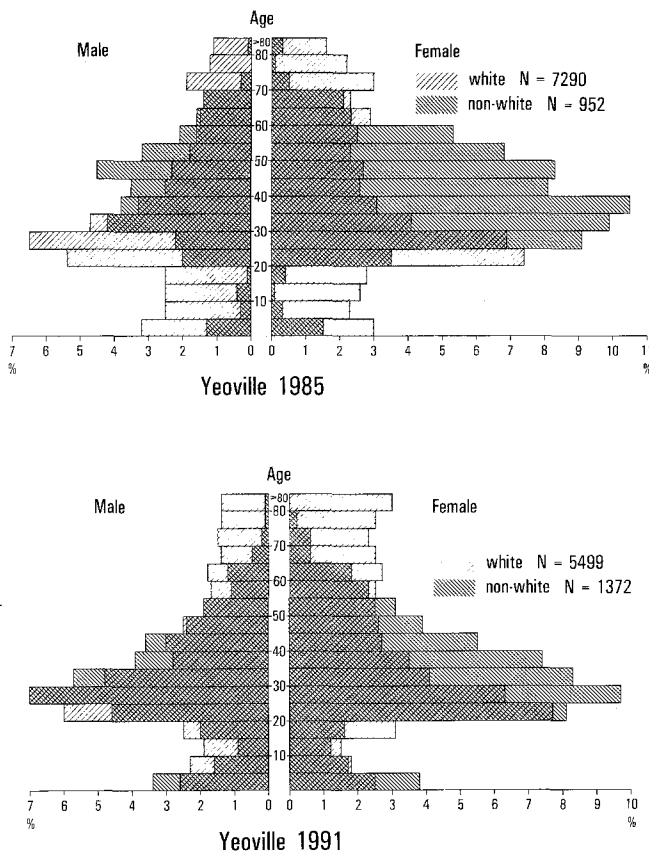


Fig 2 Population structure of Yeoville, 1985 and 1991.
Source: Republic of South Africa 1985, 1991

permission. As a rule these were servants, who often live even today in backyard houses or on the roofs of large flats (“locations in the sky”; Mather 1987) on the lots of their white employers, if they do not commute from the townships every day. With a few exceptions they do not live in family-like structures.

Actual “greying” ie the use of conventional residential space by non-whites in areas that were proclaimed white, spread to Yeoville at the beginning of the 1980s, presumably from the adjoining areas of Hillbrow and Berea. Here too this development was encouraged by the growing number of empty apartments, which were open legally only to whites. A comparison of the census results for the period from 1970 to 1991 shows a considerable decrease in the white population and in (female) blacks, who mainly work for them as servants (Republic of South Africa 1970, 1980, 1985, 1991; figures for 1991 not yet fully available) (Tab 1). In contrast, the proportion of non-whites has increased greatly, even though the census of 1991 may not completely include this group of persons, because in many cases their residential status is illegal (Fig 2).

North of Raleigh Street, the local main street and shopping mall, the population of Yeoville is characterized by Orthodox Jewish communities, which are concentrated

here. For this population group there are kosher shops, a Jewish kindergarten, a school and a number of synagogues and Torah centers. The area south of Raleigh Street is characterized on the one hand by students and self-employed persons (musicians, actors, journalists), who create a “more liberal”, cosmopolitan residential atmosphere because of the ethnic variety of the white residential population (in 1980 only 56% of the inhabitants of Yeoville were born in South Africa; *Star* 23 November 1985). On the other hand, because there are a number of welfare organizations here and a choice of rent-protected one room apartments, we also find a concentration of retired persons (Fig 3).

The cultural center for many persons belonging to intellectual and student circles is Rockey Street, the extension of Raleigh Street. Its restaurant and club atmosphere and the great variety of types of shops attract young people in particular. Despite the description of Yeoville as a “tolerant, happy community” (*Star* 28 July 1988), criminality is making inroads. This makes it more difficult for different population groups to live together and has caused an increase in safety precautions for buildings and rental housing.

Type and Extent of Mixed-Race Development

For the white population the discussion about mixed-race residential areas concentrates on the possibility that the living environment will depreciate when non-whites move in. A comparison of income and education with those of the white population (Jürgens 1991) indicates that to a great extent the non-white and mixed households have adapted themselves to Yeoville’s middle class standards and underscores that the latter group is composed primarily of upwardly mobile persons.

In contrast to the age structure of the white population, the non-white portion of the population is very young. Where in 1989 the white population showed a strong age polarization between the group of persons under 25 (39.6%) and those over 40 (31.1%), only 12.1 of the non-whites belonged to the latter group. They were led to this residential area by high spatial mobility – 43,5% of the interviewed persons in non-white and mixed households moved to Yeoville from outside of Johannesburg/Soweto, compared with 25% of the white households – and by social advancement. 55.6% of the non-white in-migrants had moved in during the course of the previous year (whites 25.6%). In comparison with neighbouring mixed-race residential areas, the more dispersed housing and the higher social status of the white population are appreciated. Although non-white persons had the same social status as their white neighbours, or even higher, in interviews with white households they were often associated with problems like “lack of social behavior,” “lack of order”, “noise making”. This insufficient acceptance is certainly the reason why individual non-whites usually lived in the shelter and anonymity of large white

households or groups of people sharing flats, or in the privacy and anonymity of apartment blocks. That the choice of a specific residential location often was more a matter of pragmatism than actual preference is demonstrated by the possibilities still open to landlords under the Group Areas Act; they could make oral promises to white renters or include clauses in rental contracts preventing mixed-race living in their buildings.

The spatial distribution of “grey” households, compared with all households in Yeoville, can be seen in Fig 4. The northern part, much of which is characterized by detached and row houses and is inhabited by a Jewish community who often function as blockbusters, had only interspersed “racial pockets”. Individual rental buildings had opened up, island-like, to non-white in-migrants. In the southern part, in contrast, there were contiguous areas with residential greying (eg Becker Street), not only of rental buildings but also of detached houses.

Whereas at the beginning of 1989 the proportion of non-white and mixed-race households in Yeoville amounted to only 3% (Jürgens 1991: 117), according to the studies of the HSRC (1992) the “greying” multiplied within a period of only two years; the majority of the persons had not moved in until 1991 and most of them moved from other formerly “white” areas of Johannesburg (HSRC 1992: 2). Socioeconomic and demographic indicators showing that the non-white population was adapting itself to the white population in 1989, were confirmed in 1991. 80% of the non-whites included in the interviews were younger than 40 years of age (whites 65%). A high proportion of persons with high school diploma (matric) (non-whites 54%) indicates that the two population groups have a similar educational background and that the motive for living in Yeoville related mainly to the choice of job.

More recent information is not available on the spatial distribution of non-white and mixed-race households as renters and owners of residential space. For the latter category we can get a fairly exact idea from the title deeds (Record of Transfers 1990ff.; Sectional Titles 1990ff). The family names of purchasers of condominiums, buildings and lots can usually be identified as typical black or Indian names. Because names of colored families follow Afrikaans or English patterns, no predictions can be made about this population group. In the period between January 1991 and July 1992, 76 blacks and Indians appeared as purchasers (ie 19.6%) in a total sales volume of 387 condominiums. This became legal after the abolition of the Group Areas Act on 1 July 1991. For houses/lots it was only 7 non-whites in a total of 108 sales (ie 6.5%). Possible reasons for the slight interest in purchasing detached houses could be that the financial burden is considerably heavier than for condominiums, credit costs are high or banks may completely deny credit to purchasers, or the purchaser may wish for anonymity in apartment blocks. The apartments recorded in the land title register were located in 54 buildings. In 32 buildings there were non-white purchasers, showing that as far as owners of apartments are concerned, “greying” affects more or less the whole area.

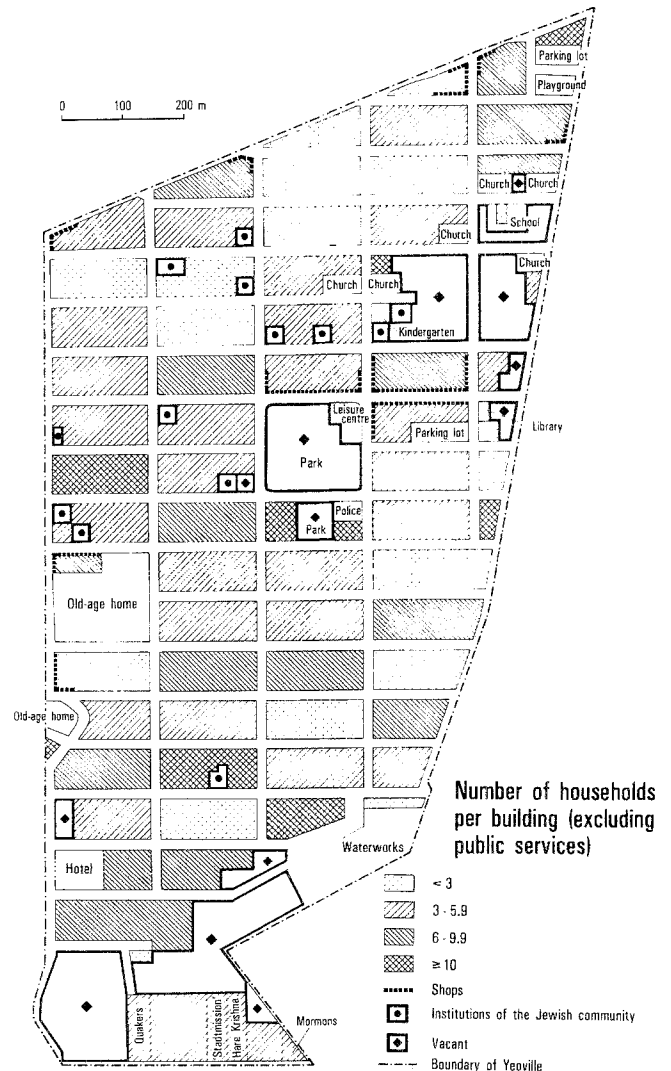


Fig 3 Land use structure of Yeoville, 1989
Source: Bähr and Jürgens 1990

The Situation after the Repeal of the Group Areas Act

Mixed-race living has increased considerably in the cities since 1 July 1991. This development is not a “one way street”, however. That is, not only have non-whites moved into formerly white neighbourhoods, but whites have also taken advantage of the chance to acquire property in elite non-white townships. Much lower prices for houses and lots have made these areas interesting, but at the price of a very marginal location within the city (*Citizen* 30 January 91). On the whole the expectations of real estate agents that non-white buyers would spark a boom on the formerly white real estate market after the repeal of the Group Areas Act have not been fulfilled. Pragmatic reasons, like the affordability of residential space (*Star* 20 July 1991) and

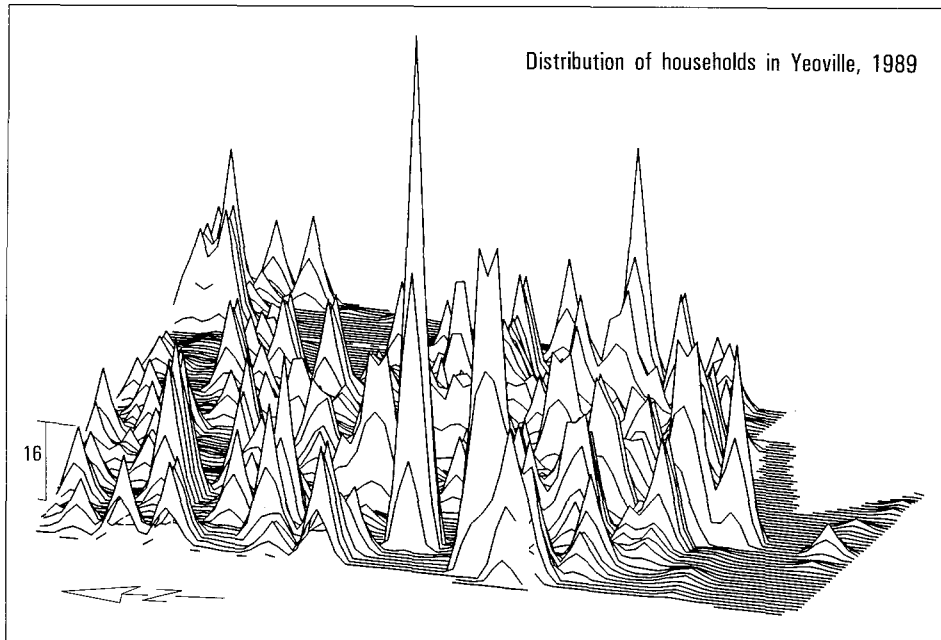
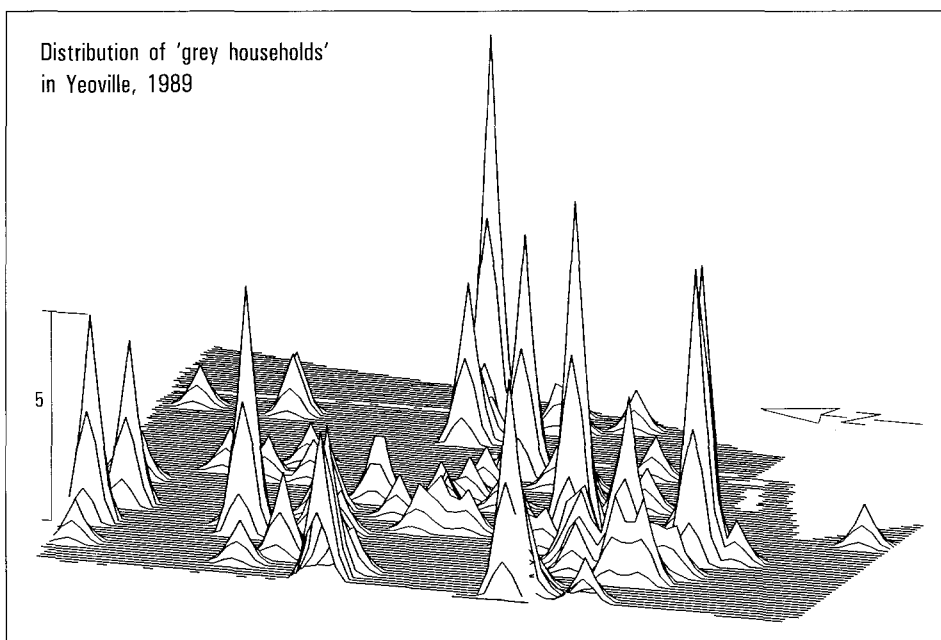


Fig 4
Spatial distribution of households
in Yeoville, 1989

Source: Jürgens 1991



the insufficient access of "white" areas to public transportation systems have prevented a higher sales volume. An important problem is also to find solvent buyers for old property in the non-white townships. The few non-white persons interested in purchasing property concentrate more on the offers in former "white" areas (*Weekly Mail* 26 July - 1 August 1991). Moreover, in new residential areas Indians often miss the contact with religious meeting places. Only sales of condominiums in "grey" areas like Hillbrow, Berea and Yeoville appear to be

very popular, as demonstrated by a 15% increase in business relations after 26 June 1991 (*Star* 20 July 1991).

Even after the repeal of the Group Areas Act institutional and private discrimination continues to exist, and it is still aimed primarily against non-whites. So-called red-lining by banks and finance companies prevents credit from being given to buy real estate (and make repairs) in "risk areas", meaning as a rule residential areas in and near the downtown where there is a tendency toward slum growth (*Johannesburg Herald* end of February 1992; *Weekly*

Mail 6–12 March 1992). At the same time real estate agents continue to refuse making all housing offers available to non-whites (“nothing available”: *Weekly Mail* 19–25 July 1991), or certain non-white population groups are given preferential treatment in the allocation of housing (“preference to Indians”: *Daily News* 22 October 1991). Another problem appears to be the degree of organization among the renters themselves. Where they have joined together in ACTSTOP – originally an association against forced eviction of illegal renters that was already started under the Group Areas Act – this group attempts, partially in concert with landlords, to keep unwanted persons or nonmembers out of certain residential buildings (*Star* 14 May 1991; *New Nation* 16–22 August 1991).

For many non-whites the outcome of this complicated situation has been that even after 1 July 1991 they have continued to rent or buy apartments with the help of (white) nominees (*Daily News* 22 October 1991). Under the conditions of the Abolition of Racially-Based Land Measures Act, a six month limit was originally set for correcting earlier registrations in the title registers and replacing the names of nominees with those of the actual owners free of cost (30 months are now planned). Very few persons had taken avail of this opportunity prior to 31 December 1991. A total of only 847 such cases were registered in the whole country (302 in the land registry office for Cape Town, 81 in Pietermaritzburg, 449 in Johannesburg, 7 in Kimberley, 8 in King William’s Town (Republic of South Africa 1992: 11183–11185).

The housing market is becoming increasingly liberalized; rent protection for older residential buildings is being abolished and they are being converted to condominiums; persons who are entitled to rent-protected

flats are being forced out and waiting lists for community housing are being set up that do not distinguish according to race (*Star* 10 September 1991). All of this has led to a considerable marginalization of white persons. Old people and the lower class are losing their homes and being forced into institutions run by charitable organizations or into rent sharing with other families. Or older people are losing their independence and being forced to live with their children (*Star* February 1991; *International Herald Tribune* 15 October 1991). On the whole these persons are being displaced by members of an upwardly mobile, non-white middle-class composed of South Africans or foreigners from other black African countries (especially Zaire, West Africa: *Citizen* 2 March 1992).

Lessons for the Post-Apartheid City

On the housing market a previously unknown competition exists, and its political implications are very dangerous. Both extremist white organizations and black groups of the most varied kind and creed are trying to exploit the impoverishment or displacement of their clientele from inner city areas to their own advantage. It is to be anticipated that not only whites but also non-whites will lose their housing as individual buildings are upgraded to condominiums or hotels. The result will be a growing squatter population in the inner city, such as has already become a matter of course in the periurban areas. In contrast to the mixed-race living in the inner city flatlands, the degree of “greying” can be expected to remain low in the formerly white garden suburbs, if only due to financial constraints.

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