

Between ontological security and the right difference: Road closures, communitarianism and urban ethics in Johannesburg, South Africa

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To live ethically is to acknowledge this shared Being, and to participate in a collective spatial politics in which a commitment to the other is our abiding concern.

[Popke, 2003]

Introduction

In 1992 the first road closure was recommended to a group of residents in Gallo Manor by the South African Police as a means to manage crime in the area. Fifteen years later, road closures, the closing off of public roads with gates and guarded entry points (fig. 1), have proliferated and are a heated topic of debate with a host of public media devoted to the topic. As the controversy around road closures has raged, the question of what the ethics of road closures are in the broader context of Johannesburg, with its segregationist past and exceptionally high levels of crime, has been asked by urban residents and government officials. Ostensibly, there are two sets of positions in the road closure argument in Johannesburg. The first argues that road closures are a response to the failure of the post-apartheid state to decrease violent crime. Johannesburg has repeatedly made it into the top five of most crime-ridden cities in the world: murder and hi-jacking statistics are amongst the highest in the world [Dirsuweit, 2002]. Johannesburg is a city that speaks of trauma – one in three women has been the victim of sexual violence, many of them have been the

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victim of more than one incident of violence and many have been gang raped. Furthermore, murder and attempted murder have flourished in post-apartheid Johannesburg. Cities have a duty to protect their inhabitants, a duty of providing them with a sense of safety – this is the right of security.



Fig. 1 – Road closure showing guarded access-point

On the other hand, those [very few] voices who have opposed road closures, have opposed them on the basis that they inhibit movement through the city and that road closures maintain and reinforce Johannesburg's segregated past. The Open City Forum, an organisation resisting closures, maintains they are racist attempts to control the city: to ensure that movement for the majority of urban residents is circumscribed into specific areas. For the Open City Forum, road closures extend the legacies of apartheid segregationist planning. Implicit in their argument is a concern with how Johannesburg recovers from its segregationist past; how it promotes a sense of citizenship to all of its residents. This is the right to difference. Those in favour of road closures, however, insist that road closures are merely a rational response to what they perceive as uncontrolled crime in Johannesburg and argue that closed neighbourhoods are racially integrated.

A number of researchers have explored the politics of fear of crime and the increased privatisation of security in South African cities [Bénil, 2004; Bénil-Gbaffou, 2005, 2006a, 2006b, forthcoming; Brogden and Shearing, 1993; Carrier, 1999; Dirsuweit, 2002; Hornberger, 2004; Lemanski, 2004; Morange and Didier, 2006; Pelsler *et alii*, 2002; Schönteich *et alii*, 2004; Shaw, 1995; Shearing, 1998; Vircoulon, 2005]. Increasingly, a strong ethnographic and urban scholarship is being established which examines the political and cultural dynamics of gated communities [Czegledy, 2003; Durrington, 2005; Hook and Vrdoljak, 2002;



Fig. 2 – Closed public road with no entry signage

Lemanski, 2006] and more specifically road closures [Dirsuweit and Wafer, 2006, forthcoming; Fabiyi, 2006; Landman, 2000a, 2000b, 2003; Landman and Lieberman, 2005; Landman and Schönteich, 2002; Naudé, 2004; Tshehla, 2003]. These have presented a range of positions on road closures including the quantification of road closures and whether they do in fact reduce crime and the production of discourses and spatial dynamics. Morange and Didier [2006] explore the discourses emerging from this [the particularly dominant] rational response framework in the context of Cape Town, arguing that this type of technical debate is ultimately pointless¹. The rational-response framework has resulted in a stale impasse: with those in favour of road closures emphasizing that theirs is a rational response to increased levels of urban violence while those against road closures argue for alternative measures to design crime out of the city. Dirsuweit and Wafer [forthcoming] argue that rather than emphasizing a causative rational-response framework, road closures should be examined in terms of their *relation* to – and *production* of – urban processes (see also Sparks *et alii* [2001, p. 886]). Drawing on Caldeira's [2001] use of de Certeau, they argue that road closures produce a set of social relations which reinforce the necessity for road closures. I would like to extend this argument in this paper, by examining how road closures relate to Johannesburg's modernist planning origins and how they serve to construct and reinforce ontological (in)security by presenting the implications these closures have for the way in which the city and its residents deal with difference. The aim of this paper, however, is not to present a detailed empirical account of road closures, but rather to contextualise the road closure discussion more broadly. This paper speaks to the road closure controversy through two objectives: the first is to provide a philosophical

1. Morange and Didier go on to explore how different discursive constructions around security are used to establish and reinforce different political positions within the city.

context in which the issue of road closures can be considered. The second is to situate road closures in a broader discussion about the transformation and democratisation of the city of Johannesburg. The spatial focus of this paper is the Sandton area which is one of the most affluent areas in Johannesburg (fig. 3) and has the highest concentration of road closures in Johannesburg (fig. 4). The discussion is based on interviews with – and documents sourced from – those in favour of and against road closures and residents associations. In addition a review of ten years of letters and comments to the editor of the local newspaper serving these areas was undertaken. Furthermore, comments in chat websites such as the Residents Against Crime (RAC) were reviewed. The objective of the empirical research was not to attempt to describe a representative trend, but rather to examine the discursive narratives of the different actors and texts engaged in the discussion.

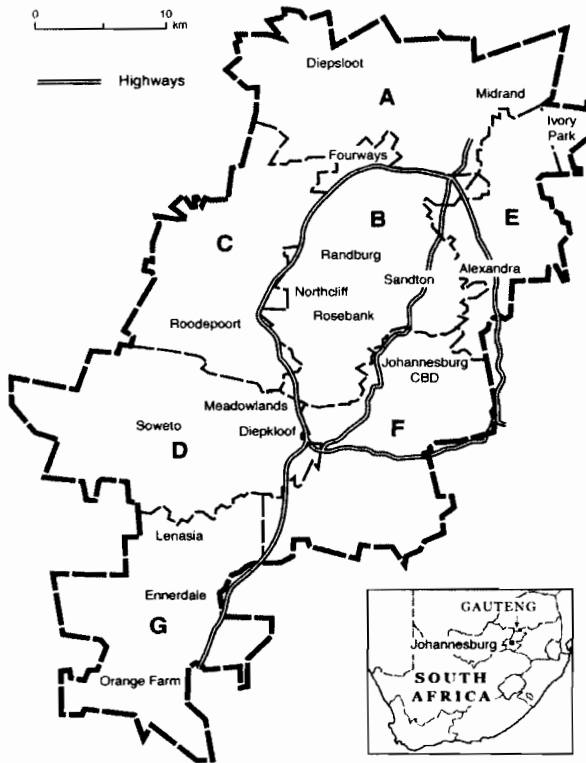


Fig. 3 – Map of Johannesburg

Modernity, alterity and Johannesburg's apartheid past

The work of Zygmunt Bauman has been used extensively in discussions of fear of crime and insecurity [Body-Gendrot, 2001; Newburn, 2001; Sparks *et alii*, 2001; Walklate, 2001]. Most of these have referred to his more recent works, but his

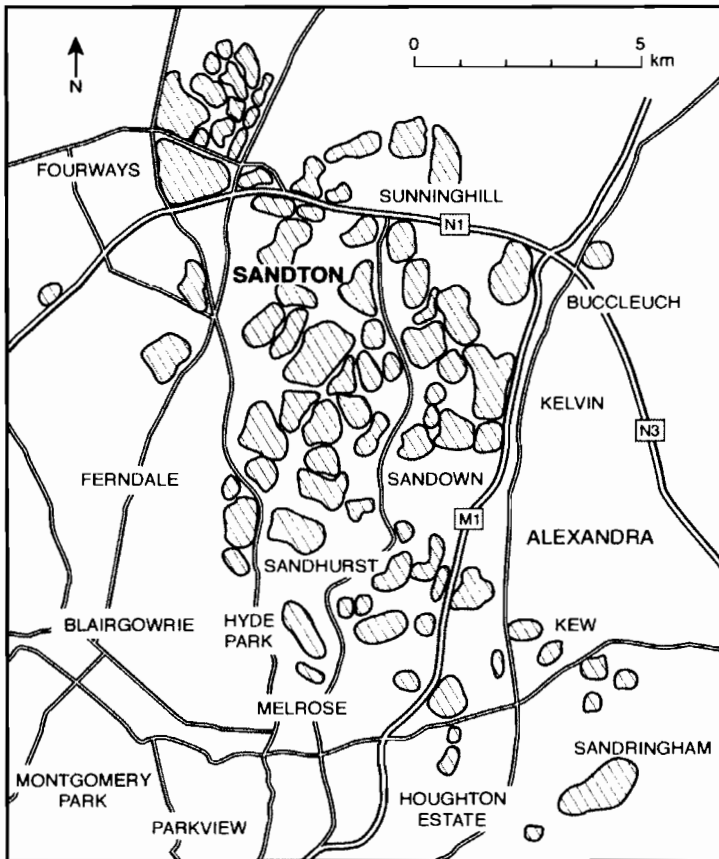


Fig. 4 – Distribution of road closures [after Landman, 2002b]

earlier work provides a profound entry point for understanding the logic of the apartheid city. For Bauman [1991, p. 1], the modern project is about the endless “fragmentation” of the world into discrete components,

To classify means to set apart, to segregate. It means first to postulate that the world consists of discrete and distinctive entities; then to postulate that each entity has a group of similar or adjacent entities with which it belongs, and with which – together – it is opposed to some other entities...

The apartheid state and apartheid cities were designed in terms of the logic of high modernity. Posel [2001, 99] argues that apartheid was a monolithic exercise to classify, enumerate and separate South Africans as part of the modernization of the state,

[t]he apartheid version of the modern state was one that was sufficiently large, powerful, knowledgeable and well co-ordinated to keep each race in its proper place economically, politically and socially.

A number of geographers [Parnell, 1997; Parnell and Mabin, 1995; Robinson, 1996; Ballard, 2002; Popke and Ballard, 2004] have spatialised this argument in the

context of urban South Africa. Several scholars have demonstrated that this project of urban territorial control was profoundly influenced by Western models of modernist urban planning [Mabin and Smit, 1997; Parnell, 1997; Parnell and Mabin, 1995; Robinson, 1996, 2006; Edwards, 1994 cited in Ballard, 2002] and Beall *et alii* [2002], describing Johannesburg as a Fordist city, argue that the segregationist practices of town planners not only served to reinforce white dominance, but also produced the spaces necessary for apartheid capitalism with a predominantly black working class. The apartheid project of separation and segregation into race, class and ethnicity units was a project of Taylorist management, but this segregation was never complete. The danger of one group moving into the area designated for another was frequently rehearsed in an attempt to form and manipulate public fears in favour of the apartheid state; and so inherent in the segregation of different cultures was the performance of territorial control against the incursion of abject others. In the aporetic logic of apartheid the threat of difference meant that: because South Africans were different they were separate; because they were separate they were different.

Ontological (in)security in post-apartheid, post-Fordist Johannesburg

The reality of post-apartheid Johannesburg has been that South Africans (and especially white South Africans) find without the endless segregation and control of the apartheid state, co-existence in South African cities is characterized by contingency and in the face of this contingency South Africans have found themselves grappling with a profound sense of ontological insecurity. Giddens [1991] argues that this heightened sense of insecurity emerges as systems of trust become increasingly abstract. Our sense of well-being and placement in the world becomes tenuous. There are several post-apartheid changes which have become intertwined in the imaginaries of the middle-classes: as the security of apartheid classification and dominance has come to an end; as South Africa has become an increasingly multicultural pan-African society; as South Africa has joined a highly competitive and insecure globalised economy; and as crime rates have increased, road closures can be interpreted as part of what Giddens terms "...a framework of ontological security based on routines of various forms" [1991, p. 44]. In response to this generalized feeling of insecurity, urban residents have become concerned with prevention and protection. For proponents, road closures, are an attempt to rationalize the massive problem of crime [and perceived failures of a new dispensation] by dividing the city into spatial units which can be ordered and controlled through private control:

Communities cannot be blamed for confining their primary efforts to their own, manageable areas... [emphasis added]. [Sandton Chronicle: 13 March 1998]

Bauman [1991, p. 1] unpacks the opacity of the functioning of this normalised idea of management which connects the strategy specifically to the project of modernity and to Giddens' comments about ontological security,

To classify in other words, is to give the world a structure: to manipulate its probabilities; to make some events more likely than some others; to behave as if events were not random, or to limit and eliminate the randomness of events.

There is a similar thread in the use of the logic of modernity to maintain a sense of spatial management of the city during apartheid and in post-apartheid road closures. Popke and Ballard (2004) for example demonstrate that within discourses of urban mismanagement and disorder in the inner city of Durban, there is a melancholic nostalgia for the [imagined] order of apartheid high modernity. In the same way road closures are spatialised attempts to control and limit the random and traumatic incidence of crime [and projections of disorder; cf. Dirsuweit and Wafer, forthcoming] and this is frequently rehearsed in warning statements – beware those who enter our suburb with ill intent. The ethics of road closures and the way in which they deal with difference lies in the question of how these persons with ill intent are recognized, what criteria are used to determine who is and who is not welcome, and how are those who are not welcome dealt with.

Normative modernist moralities and post-modern ethics

Bauman [1993, p. 2] argues that the post-structural thinking of the early nineties regarded the issue of ethics:

...as one of the typically modern constraints now broken... fetters once deemed necessary, now clearly superfluous... Lipovetsky... suggests that we have finally entered the epoch of l'après-devoir, a post-deontic epoch, where our conduct has been freed from the last vestiges of oppressive "infinite duties", "commandments" and "absolute obligations".

Ethics, however, can be distinguished from modernist modes of morality. Modernist morality resolves problems through "coercive normative regulation in political practice, and the philosophical search for absolutes, universals and foundations" [Bauman, 1993, 4]. For Bauman, rather than closing the space ethics, post-structural thinking opens up new ways of engaging with ethics based on the awareness and acceptance of ambivalence. Neither a normative, nor a relativist position, Bauman (following Levinas) presents ethics which concern the relationship between Self and Other while acknowledging that this relationship is constructed, variable, incomplete and is potentially oppressive whether there is apparent little care for the Other or whether the care for the Other is overwhelming.

Over the past few years, geographers have concerned themselves with the question of ethics towards the Other [Cloke, 2002; Cutchin, 2002; Kobayashi and Proctor, undated; Popke, 2003; Proctor and Smith, 1999; Routledge, 2004; Smith, 1997, 1998, 2000a, 2000b]. Smith [1998] makes a number of comments about communitarianism (Pløger's We-ness) which can be applied to the scale of road closures. Smith [1998, p. 27] is critical of the concept of community: "a hierarchy of moral responsibility with an implicit spatial dimension." He argues that while those in favour of communitarianism recognize the potential for insularity and indifference to outsiders, they struggle to resolve the issues of intracommunity conflicts and "such power asymmetries as domination, oppression and exclusion" [p. 28] between communities. Etzioni [1995] for example resolves these issues by looking towards the universalised logic of the supracommunity (in this case

American society) while Selznick [1992], Smith argues, situates the idea of community within the particular and the universal, but that the particular is more secure in relation to the principles of universalism.

The construction and maintenance of community identity are well-documented as means to improve a sense of ontological security. Planners such as Pløger [2001, p. 69] argue that, “a feeling of social security is still believed to be the product of neighbourhood relations and local interaction, community-based social networks, a predictable social environment, and moral-ethical homogeneity and conformity”. While Pløger (ibid) offers that this is the first step to shape a *communitarian ethic* which in turn is a “commitment towards the Other, to ‘the care of others’, and to common virtues, morals and ethics” [Bauman, 1997; Vetlesen, 1996], in the case of road closures, the expulsion of – and vigilance against – a range of others results in a very limited inward-looking ethic, resulting in:

The territorial and functional autonomy which the fragmentation of powers brings in its wake consists first and foremost in the right not to look beyond the fence and not to be looked at from the outside of the fence. [Bauman, 1991, p. 12]

Cloke [2002] draws our attention to Augé’s description of two means of engaging with otherness: a “sense *of* other” involves establishing a sense of the moral geographies of a particular group. A sense which, Cloke argues, tends to confine “others” into a “thought prison of the same”. A “sense *for* other” requires sensitivity to being connected, committed and emotionally engaged with difference. Popke [2003] extends the point, arguing that our accountability to the other becomes elided when mediating institutions assert universal ethical norms. Bannister and Fyfe [2001, p. 807] summarise the issue, “ultimately, is it possible to reconcile the conflicting images of the city as a celebration of difference and as an arena in which difference is to be feared?” There is a greater geography of ethics here which deals specifically with the form and content of how we create a commitment towards the Other [Bauman, 1997].

Road closures, communitarianism and the construction of “others”

It is argued by proponents that road closures attract a wide range of different cultures and, despite some racist incidents between residents within, the closures are not manifestations of residual racism:

It has nothing to do with racism – we have people of all colours living in our neighbourhood. [Sandton Chronicle, 6 Mar 1998]

May I point out that this is no racial issue, but one of crime and security affecting us all. As a black South African, I wish to ask Mr Ramsay where he was in the dark days of apartheid... please don’t use the plight of black people simply because you feel inconvenienced by having to travel a few extra metres – now that smacks of racism! [Sandton Chronicle, 13 Mar 1998]

In interviews and letters to the editor, those in favour of road closures quite unabashedly claimed that the road closures were effective in excluding on the basis of class. Indeed there are a range of classed and raced bodies that are not welcome

within the closures. In most cases these bodies are simply not apparent: those who belong to poorer classes are simply not present except in the liminal figures of the service workers, domestic workers, contractors and state and private officials. However, these liminal figures have attracted a great deal of comment and discussion within the pages of the newspapers reviewed – they remain abject, if not the focus of urban anxieties. Several articles and letters warn about domestic workers. In particular there is a set of letters which warn residents that in conspiracy with criminals, domestic workers lay colour-coded signals in the driveway which indicate the level of resistance to attack a particular household will demonstrate. In addition, the “bogus” state official or worker: a criminal dressed as a meter reader or repair worker is frequently reported on. Those who belong to a different class identity, but who serve within the boundaries of the road closure remain anxiety-provoking in-between characters. Vagrants and foreigners from other parts of Africa are also abject and any form of densification is associated with increased levels of criminality and is vigorously opposed. It is difficult to characterize the experience of road closures of these and silent others without having completed empirical research, but there is a celebration of their departure in the comments of those living within.

So, 14 months down the line, apart from that small incident, we have experienced zero crime. We also have almost zero litter, zero vagrants and no loiterers [emphasis added]. Children can now ride their bikes in the streets in safety and life in our suburb is immeasurably better. Complacency has not taken over as residents must still be on guard and when we pass into the “outside” world, crime reigns supreme and you have to be continually on guard. [Sandton Chronicle, 26 June 1998]

In creating a normative inside and the threat of the abnormalised outside, road closures, whether they are effective in reducing crime or not, offer a very powerful means of securing ontological certainty. Attendant to this sense of ontological security within the road closure has been a renewed sense of community:

...there has been a definite drop in crime in suburbs where roads have been closed. People are also talking to neighbours again and are having street braais [barbecues]. They are jogging and walking their dogs, while children are cycling and rollerblading in the streets. This kind of community spirit has not existed in Sandton for years. [Sandton Chronicle, 23 Jan 1998]

...the extent of hard work and voluntary time given to the enterprise can hardly be called selfish unless one means “collective selfishness”. These endeavours result in a heightened sense of community awareness and create contact between previously anonymous neighbours... [Sandton Chronicle, 13 March 1998]

It is difficult to see how the communitarian ethic of road closures will ever result in “the care of others” since otherness is so anxiety provoking, controlled and circumscribed within these enclosed territories. Furthermore, within the articles, letters and online chat rooms, victims of crime are characterised as middle-classed [and generally white] which limits and even precludes concern for – and any kind of proactive engagement together with – Others to resolve the issue of crime more broadly.

Fiscal secessionism, road closures and care for urban Others

The reasons road closures exist in Johannesburg are complicated and while they do reinforce anxieties about a range of urban Others, the motivations for establishing road closures are complex and cannot be generalised. Since there are such high crime rates in Johannesburg it is difficult to present an unequivocal normative judgement as to whether they should remain or not. Road closures are both a product of the broader socio-economic urban context and coevally produce the context of the city. Sandton one of the richest Northern suburbs in Johannesburg is bordered by a large township, Alexandra, arguably one of the poorest districts in Johannesburg. For Sandton residents, Alexandra is a repository of Otherness: frequently referred to as the “dark city”, it conjures images of a ghetto housing a violent urban underclass which serves as a constant threat to suburban existence. The legacy of apartheid local government left Johannesburg in extraordinary economic crisis. With huge deficits looming, it sought to balance its tax base through the policy of cross-subsidisation. Subsequently, the city was divided into four local governance units which coupled Sandton with Alexandra. A uniform property assessment rate was implemented across the different substructures [Tomlinson, 1999; Larsen, 2005; Camay and Gordon, undated]. Sandton residents were hard-hit in these reassessments with radical rates increases². Sandton residents and business owners, however, felt this economic redress was unfair. They argued that they had not been in favour of apartheid and they could not be held responsible for apartheid spending and that they supported many charitable programmes during and post apartheid [Camay and Gordon, undated]. In July 1996, with broad support from the Sandton community, one of the ratepayers associations began a rates boycott, a political tool of passive resistance ironically used in Alexandra during apartheid [Tomlinson, 1999; Camay and Gordon, undated]. Eventually, the case was taken to the highest judicial authority, the Constitutional court, which directed Sandton business and ratepayers were to continue rate payments to local government [Tomlinson, 1999; Camay and Gordon, undated].

The case demonstrates the consequences of parochial communitarianism: the cross-subsidisation of other(ed) communities appeared to disturb efforts to ensure ontological security. Ballard [2005] argues that as the securities of apartheid segregation have been threatened, a sense of security has been maintained through the creation of homogenous territories symbolising secession from the broader processes of transformation in the city. Dirsuweit and Wafer [2006] argue that this secession from the broader scale of the city is intended to maintain privileged lifestyles. The rates boycott demonstrates a startling economic secession and a misplaced sense of entitlement. While a few charitable efforts to improve Alexandra may demonstrate a sense *of* others, the active resistance to the broader socio-economic and political integration of the city that the rates boycott represents demonstrates a limited care *for* others.

2. Different figures are reported, Tomlinson argues that the rates increased from 2.65 cents in the Rand to 6.45 cents (243%). Larsen reports an increase of between 120 percent and 250 percent and Camay and Gordon report an increase of 385%.

The ratepayers boycott demonstrates that while road closures may exist for a range of reasons, they are part of (producing and upholding) an urban context characterised by a remarkable lack of concern for those who fall outside of localities of self-identification. In the case of the rates boycott case, it took the normative judgement of an institution to enforce a particular set of ethical responsibilities to the other. Similarly, the Open City Forum has lodged a complaint against road closures with the Human Rights Commission [HRC report, 2005, p. 5-6], who found that³:

- [Road closures] cause social division, dysfunctional cities and lead to the further polarisation of our society. In addition, the proposed benefits they bring by way of enhanced safety and security are in doubt and the subject of considerable debate.
- The use of road closures/boom gates... in practice violate a number of rights.
- Local authorities and communities should consider and exhaust alternate access restrictions, including guards and guard houses, traffic calming measures and closed circuit television.

In their report, the Commission examines a number of rights based arguments: equality; human dignity; the right to life; freedom and security of the person; privacy; political rights; freedom of movement and residence; freedom of trade, occupation and profession; and the limitation of rights. In both cases, the Human Rights Commission and the Constitutional Court were exemplary in asserting an ethic of post-apartheid urban socio-economic redress as well as providing advocacy for the promotion of a vision of an ethical city. Both the Constitutional court and the Human Rights Commission dealt in the universalized “impartial” moralities [Smith, 1998] embedded in the South African Constitution and Bill of Rights. While these incidents were both critical to the political and social transformation of Johannesburg, their resolution depends on Bauman’s “absolutes, universals and foundations” and the residents of Sandton responded with a sense of coerced outrage. The rulings have been met with enormous resentment and, in the case of the constitutional court ruling for cross-subsidisation, the Sandton community has subsequently responded in an angry backlash against local government which is characterized in letters to the Sandton Chronicle as consistently lazy, inefficient, incapable and corrupt. Despite a clear message from the institutions which are invested with the power to deliberate on the ethics of South African society, in Sandton, the particularity of solidarity and care for one’s [in this case literal] neighbour maintains a strong separation between self and other. Furthermore, drawing on universalised moralities may not resolve issues of exclusion: in their arguments against road closures, the Open City Forum and government approve of other forms of enclosure. The Open City Forum does not object to those living in gated communities which are situated on privately owned land [Interview Karvelas, Open City Forum: 2005] and Thabo Mbeki, in a speech at the official opening of a controlled access housing project, commented that these developments are the kind that the

3. These points are only an extract of the findings.

city approved of and should be pursued in favour of road closures. In their approval of other forms of gated communities, however, both fail to deal with the issue of contingency. Road closures and other forms of territorial management and control are complex exactly because in the face of randomness and contingency they do offer ontological security, but they also foreclose difference.

...the gates, policing and other surveillance systems, defensive architecture, and neo-traditional urbanism do contribute to giving people a greater sense of security. But such settings no doubt also contribute to accentuating fear by increasing paranoia and distrust among people [Ellin, 1996, p. 153].

Modernity, ethics and the world class city

Road closures (and other forms of enclosure) may reduce crime, but in the long term reinforce sense of hostility towards the other. And this is a hostility which not only occurs between the middle-classes and the poor, but also between a whole range of others in broader Johannesburg society. Specifically, Johannesburg has been the setting of escalating systemic violence [Young, 1990] against urban poor, women, children, people with disabilities, foreigners and gays and lesbians in all sectors of society [Reid and Dirsuweit, 2002]. Despite having some of the most progressive and inclusive legislation and policies in the world, the rights entrenched in policy, legislation and the legal structures that enforce them, remain to a large part *de jure* – bound to institutions like the Human Rights Commission and the Constitutional Court which deal with universalised moralities. The invigoration of these normative moralities for the citizens of Johannesburg remains problematic: in the everyday existence of urban Others, the *de facto* expression of urban citizenship is highly circumscribed not only by the everyday practices of exclusion such as road closures, but *also* by the continued commitment of the state to the ongoing project of modernist development. For example, after experiencing a huge loss business tenants to the northern suburbs, the city authorities have sought to re-establish Johannesburg as a “World Class City”, which is imagined as follows:

Johannesburg is where the money is. And the action. It's the most powerful commercial centre on the African continent. It is an African city that works: the phones dial, the lights switch on, you can drink the water, there are multi-lane freeways, skyscrapers, conference centres, golf courses. If you should get lost, ordinary people on the street speak English. Cell phones are everywhere. You can send e-mail from you hotel room, you can bank any foreign currency, you can watch CNN... [City of Johannesburg, Official Website]

That this discourse is thick with European constructions of modernity is obvious and Robinson (2006) further details the relationship between developmentalist policies and Western modernity. But what are the ethics of this commitment to Western modernity? As part of this impetus to construct the modern African city, massive regeneration projects have been undertaken and increasing numbers of black and white elites are moving back into the inner-city taking up residential and office space. There is no doubt that regeneration is desirable and will improve the image and security aspects of the city, however, the process thus far has entailed the

removal of a number of the urban poors from derelict buildings earmarked for renovation to the far periphery away from economic, social and cultural opportunities [Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions, 2005]. The imperatives of post-Fordist urban consumption are increasingly reconfiguring the city, but the removal of poorer people to the periphery of the city reinforces a modernist conception of excising and segregating foreclosing any project of engagement and acceptance. Greenberg's [2004, p. 2-14] comment on the issue provides a powerful linkage to Bauman's discussion of the ethics of modernity,

...the development and modernisation of the formal market economy is viewed to be the basis of social advance. Modernisation means dismantling outdated forms of organization or economic structures, eliminating obstacles to renewed profitable accumulation, and reshaping the economy in ways that permit an intersection with international capital flows and technological advances... In the face of a coldly rational model of planning, the horror of forced removals has not been consigned to history along with apartheid, but remains alive in post-apartheid South Africa [emphasis added].

Urban regeneration appears to be focussed on creating a symbolic economy palatable to the consumption choices of foreign and regional tourism and new urban elites rather than the creation of a city in which engagement between others becomes normalised. Certainly there is little if not no public participation involved in the removal of others from the city centre and although more research is required, there are indications that the public participation processes associated with other aspects of Johannesburg's inner city regeneration have been little more than public relations exercises communicating projects *fait accompli*⁴. So while the city and national policy purport an inclusive attitude towards difference and while there are a number of projects which are sympathetic towards difference (see the Human Development Strategy of the City of Johannesburg), it appears that this tolerance is interpreted primarily through a developmentalist framework associated with Western modernity.

Conclusion: security and (in)difference

The communitarian politics of exclusion of Others from road closures cannot be resolved without a broader commitment to resolve the painful exclusionary practices associated with modernist modes of classification, segregation and control. Tonkiss [2003] provides a fascinating insight into how the ethic of the interrelated sense of self and other could play itself out in the city of Johannesburg. She suggests an ethic of *indifference* which she defines as the capacity for difference to be unseen, unexceptional and strangeness part of everyday lived practice. In this ethic, difference is left unassimilated and lived with in a "side-by-side particularity" [Young, 1990]. Here indifference is understood as tolerance as opposed to the logic of otherness which is "frequently played out in violent modes of exclusion or

4. In her classic piece, Arnstein (1969) would term this form of participation as therapeutic and manipulative on her ladder of participation.

isolating forms of disconnection and strangeness" [Tonkiss, 2003, p. 308]. This has an extraordinary implication for Johannesburg: if we recognize that post-apartheid exclusions in the form of road closures and other enclosures are in part a consequence of the hold that modernist apartheid urban classification still has on the city, then the way in which we deal with difference requires far greater concern. To fully understand and reverse the classifications and segregations of apartheid, for its residents to attain a sense for the other, difference could become an ordinary and extraordinary feature of Johannesburg. The production of spaces of engagement, however, is impaired: in the same way as road closures preclude engagement, the public spaces of Johannesburg are highly controlled privatized fortresses where the functions of public life are played out without the attendant civic responsibilities of public institutions [Dirsuweit and Schattauer, 2004].

Sandercock [1997; 2000] argues that cities can and should be planned in response to systemic violences by engaging with the interdependent concepts of the "right to the city" and the "right to difference". Sandercock [1997, p. 24] suggests that the modernist urban planning should be replaced with an ethos both fluid and responsive to context and change. Heavily influenced by Young (1990), her vision of cosmopolis is premised on three principles:

- an acknowledgement of the politics of difference;
- a belief in inclusive democracy; and
- an engagement with the justice claims of disempowered communities.

In these three principles, however, Sandercock touches on a worrying feature of the question of road closures in Johannesburg: that those others implicated in road closures remained silent. With the implosion of the non-governmental sector during the mid-1990s and with civil society social movements in their infancy, the exclusionary effects of Johannesburg's modernist-developmental planning policies are only starting to be understood and, in some cases, challenged.

In his influential book, *Moral Geographies*, Smith [2000, p. 169] recognizes the power of the South African case, "[it has a] distinctive moral geography encouraging antipathy towards difference. So, a way has to be found of enabling the strength of communitarian sentiments of mutuality to be augmented by respect for, and inclusion of, different others". But this is not an inward looking communitarianism, rather it relates to Bauman's [1993, p. 166] comment that "moral concern would reach its highest intensity where knowledge of the other is at its richest and most intimate, and that it would thin out as knowledge tapers off and intimacy is gradually transformed into estrangement". The active inclusion of social movements and organizations representing a range of difference in a *sincere and transparent* process of public participation [rather than a series of public relations exercises] would certainly go a long way in activating a concern for distant others. Johannesburg is also ready to begin developing a far greater multicultural literacy. Popke [2003], in his assertion of the relevance of post-structural thinking to the question of the geography of ethics, draws on Levinas and Derrida to elucidate relevance of theories of deconstruction to thought on ethics. Deconstruction, he argues,

entails the dislocation of accepted sovereignties and affirms the need for analysis and decisions to be contextual and cognizant of responsibility to the other: “opening to limitless possibility in the absence of hubris” [Popke, 2003, p. 308]. This “deconstructive ethos of democracy” opens itself to endless critique [and fluid response] enabling “an always-open form of multiculturalism”. This and his suggestion that the infrastructure of modernity be examined for the ways it provides cover for the abrogation of our sense for the other, echoes Sandercock’s analysis of the negative effects of modernist planning. But in addition to her analysis, Popke suggests that the metaphysics of “ontology” [which should be read in the context of this paper as the production of ontological security] be upset by providing a reflection of how (old and new) spatial boundaries and divisions reinforce and maintain distinctions between self and other.

To conclude I return to my initial questions: What are the ethics of the road closures, particularly in a city with some of the highest crime statistics in the world? This is a complex question considering the broader socio-political context of Johannesburg and its still poorly understood modernist planning past. The question, however, is not whether road closures should be removed, but rather how Johannesburg residents commit themselves to a city in which difference is commonplace and unremarkable. This also relates to how Johannesburg at a local and regional level respects and responds to difference in terms of giving voice to disempowered others and enabling spaces of engagement which are more inclusive in everyday governance praxis. While South Africa has extraordinary institutions such as the Constitutional Court and the Human Rights Commission, which protect the rights and respond to the need to equalise society, there is a massive gap in the way in which Johannesburg residents have a sense for others in the everyday practices and spaces of the city. Without clear strategies to promote an engaged sense of citizenship for all of Johannesburg’s residents, the question of whether road closures should be removed is asked largely out of context. Without a broader sense for Others in policy and practice, there is a powerful logic to the protection of the self as paramount despite the cost to excluded others.

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