

ARTICLE

Mmila (the Road) and the Great Stoep

Tsholofelo Joshua KOOPEDI

Correspondence

Tsholofelo Joshua KOOPEDI,
University of Pretoria, Pretoria,
South Africa.
Email: u20821175@tuks.co.za

Abstract This paper explores and questions the promise of service delivery and infrastructural upgrades made in the City of Ekurhuleni in postapartheid South Africa, its immateriality in relation to concepts of modern African heritage. The paper is drawn from my PhD research which compares how the roads and stormwater Repairs, and Maintenance Budget of the City of Ekurhuleni has been resourced, organized, and distributed across the city's townships since 2000. It interrogates the budget process and its effectiveness as a political tool – rather than a technical tool – that pursues spatial justice and transformation of these previously underdeveloped townships. Section 153(a) of the South African Constitution delegates a municipality to 'structure and manage its administration and budgeting and planning processes to give priority to the basic needs of the community, and to promote the social and economic development of the community'.

There are all sorts of roads and in the precolonial African epistemology there are roads of spiritual nature that take one through their spiritual journey from before they are born to beyond their death. We should also remember that Mmila (roads) are a natural part of nature, in that in precolonial Africa, the indigenous people will allow their livestock to create these paths that would lead them to an essential resource such as water sources and or grazing fields. Even before the people had livestock, they would follow the paths that would be created by undomesticated animals for them to find essential water sources. Even when we think of roads today, they lead us to places where the people can access essential resources to sustain their livelihoods.

(Mokgethi, 2021)

These words were the immediate thoughts of Papa Mogolo Mokgethi (73) when I told him that my PhD thesis Space, Infrastructure and Budgets: A Case of Roads and Stormwater Maintenance in the City of Ekurhuleni, South Africa, 2000–2020 will be focusing on roads and how roads affect and recreate the spaces where they are built as well as the fact that the lack of maintenance makes these spaces worse-off places. The conversation that took place between myself and my grandfather-in-law made me think more deeply about the road as infrastructure, and its genesis as part of our heritage.

Tsholofelo Joshua KOOPEDI (u20821175@tuks.co.za) is a local government practitioner whose main interest is urban economics as well as the critical role developmental local government has to play in transforming South Africa's spatial patterns to enhance equitable service delivery.

Curator: The Museum Journal 2022, 65.3 701–709 DOI: 10.1111/cura.12522

© 2022 The Authors. *Curator: The Museum Journal* published by Wiley Periodicals LLC.

This is an open access article under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs License, which permits use and distribution in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, the use is non-commercial and no modifications or adaptations are made.

701

My careful reflection on his input (because in my culture you do not respond to an elder), was that indeed roads have been a critical infrastructure for people from the beginning of time. I decided to write as I reflected further on my thoughts after our conversation. For even the roads of today have been influenced by colonialism and apartheid, to ensure that the capitalist extraction of labour from 'black townships' occurs as quickly and efficiently as possible to guarantee the maximization of surplus value. In fact, it is my presupposition that the reason there were never tarred roads in black townships was to remind those previously classified as 'Bantu' that we belonged to the dirt, that we belonged to that area where the space must never be clean and must be always full of dust.

I also reflected that for many black South Africans, before the democratic dispensation in South Africa in the early 1990s, there was an excitement and a promise of a smooth day when they would use the highway to access the city or 'white townships/suburbs' – this is because in typical township lexicon they would be overexuberant about the journey and say Si'gibela i'stoep (translated into English as 'getting on to the highway'). A *stoep* is a South African term for 'porch'. Porches are typically well cared for and always kept shiny. If I think of the purpose of a stoep, I think of it as a modern-day infrastructure that enhances (modernizes) the space around the house. I am just not sure what were the actual thoughts of those that first referred to the highway as a *stoep*. This is perhaps analogous to what we might think of as the immateriality of infrastructure and its complicated relationship to heritage; or specifically for this paper how municipal infrastructure (roads and stormwater in particular) play a role in curating the postapartheid black township.

In the main, this conversation reaffirmed my hypothesis that the equitable maintenance of roads and stormwater infrastructure in black townships is essential in the creation of a just space, which never existed in the apartheid black township.

Part of my hypothesis also states that municipal budgets should be accepted as a political tool that seeks to ensure spatial justice in black townships and not be seen as a technical tool that is determined based on a particular percentage point of the capital investment budget.

This argument is at the heart of this paper and speaks directly to municipal infrastructure and the immateriality and/or materiality of the built environment as well as the role of municipal infrastructure in curating the postapartheid modern black township.

As Frans Fanon (1961, p. 81) reminds us, the 'settlers' town is a 'strongly built town, all made of stone and steel. It is a brightly lit town; the streets are covered with asphalt. . . His feet are protected by strong shoes although the streets of his town are clean and even, with no holes or stone. Little has changed in postapartheid South Africa despite political change, and in many ways Fanon's words remain relevant today. 'The town belonging to the colonized people . . . is a world without spaciousness; men live there on top of each other, and their huts are built one on top of the other. The native town is a hungry town, starved of bread, of meat, of shoes, of coal, of light' (Fanon).

Two fundamental points can be drawn from the assertions made by Fanon. South African townships, which share historic genetics with the colonial 'settlers' town', posture as modern towns even. Whereas the black township, that is the 'town belonging to the colonized people' remains underdeveloped. Secondly, elements such as stone, steel, asphalt, garbage, coal and light are a function of municipal infrastructure. For municipal infrastructure to have a role in curating the postapartheid modern black township there should be equitable provision of services in black townships without compromising the services standards in the white township.

COLONIZATION OF A SPECIAL TYPE, APARTHEID, AND DEVELOPMENTAL LOCAL GOVERNMENT

South African cities are not only a reflection of the apartheid city, but they also reflect the colonial city. The nexus between the colonial and apartheid states is generally accepted by David Simon (1989) and many others. Simon specifically states that: While the extent of legal codification of racial discrimination and the fact that internationally recognized independence was attained by a dominant white minority practicing such policies are distinctive, South Africa shared a colonial history of European conquest and capital exploitation with much of sub-Saharan Africa. Indeed, early British 'native' policy in South Africa, including the rationale for, and implementation of, urban segregation became the model for German and other British settlement colonies in southern, Central and East Africa. It was this inheritance of native reserves and urban segregation of Africans which was adopted and systematized by Afrikaner nationalist for their own purposes. The features of the distinctive apartheid city and its emergence out of colonial segregation city in terms of the notorious 1950 and 1966 Group Areas Act, and Reservation of Separation amenities Act are well known (Simon, 1989) Simon.

I reference the nexus of the colonial and apartheid states to reaffirm that, indeed, the apartheid city and subsequent supporting legislation was solely aimed at 'total racial segregation at all geographic scales' (Simon,). Propositions about the post-colonial city or developmental local government cannot be sustained if they are not located in the national context in which local government operates. As argued by David Barron and Gerald Frug, 'Cities are not free to do whatever they please. They can exercise power only within the legal frameworks that others have created for them' (Barron & Frug, 2006).

Unfortunately for South Africa, there seems to be no consensus of the posture that developmental local government must take in relation to the complex histories of our national context. This is perhaps typified in the now famous tweet by Helen Zille. The support it generated reflects the lack of consensus on what the developmental local government should seek to attain: 'I completely agree that colonialism was bad. All I said was that its Legacy is not ONLY negative' (Zille, 2017).

Such sentiments are not only shared on social media but seem to have been part of the local government development policies in the City of Cape Town where Zille's political party, the Democratic

Alliance, has majority support and whose city improvement districts (CIDs) 'seek' to alter or rather enforce a neo-segregated built environment in the city. Jodi Allemeier's comment on the Draft CID Policy and By-Law asserted that 'with an increasing number of CIDs being established in residential areas, the link to economic development becomes more about protection of property values. While this can service city's interests from a revenue perspective in the short term, it can contradict key spatial restructuring and spatial justice mandates, and financial efficiency objectives in the long-term' (Allemeier, 2021).

The characterization of developmental local government is informed by the realities of the legacy of apartheid on the South African local government system, which the White Paper on Local Government (1998) defines as having *fundamentally damaged the spatial, social, and economic environments in which people live, work, raise families, and seek to fulfill their aspirations. . . Apartheid has left its imprint on South Africa's human settlements and municipal institutions. Transformation requires an understanding of the historical role of local government in creating and perpetuating local separation and inequity, and the impact of apartheid on municipal institutions* (White Paper on Local Government, 1998).

The Spatial Planning and Land Use Management Act of 2013 is the leading and guiding legislation on spatial issues in South Africa and one of its key objectives is to 'redress the imbalances of the past and to ensure that there is equity in the application of spatial development planning and land use management systems' (SPLUMA, 2013).

The extent to which such imbalances have been undone will reflect in the spaces and spatial justice created within the built environment in the postapartheid township.

SPACE AND SPATIAL JUSTICE

We looked to Fanon to understand the deeply rooted structural challenges and inequalities in municipal infrastructure in black and white townships. However, it is through the seminal work of Henri Lefebvre where one can clearly synthesize the role of municipal infrastructure in curating the postapartheid modern black township and how this results in spatially just environments. Lefebvre correctly postulates that 'a revolution that does not produce a new space has not realised its full potential, indeed, it has failed in that it has not changed life itself, but has merely changed ideological superstructures, institutions or political apparatuses' (Lefebvre, 1991).

The developmental perspectives laid out in the White Paper are correct in stating that apartheid fundamentally damaged the spatial environment of local government. This resulted in spatial injustice, which was the thesis of the apartheid city. It thus follows that the antithesis of the apartheid city should be reflected through spatial justice.

Space is therefore organized in line with the prevailing policies of the governing party, through various national and local institutions and established legislation. Space is also managed through the investment in and maintenance of infrastructure. As Henri Lefebvre argues in his seminal work *The Production of Space* (1991), ‘spatial practice consists in a projection onto a (spatial) field of all aspects, elements and moments of social practice. In the process these are separated from one another, though this does not mean that overall control is relinquished even for a moment: society as a whole continues in subjection to political practice – that is state power’ (Lefebvre).

As it relates to spatial justice, geographer Edward Soja conceptualizes spatial (in)justice as ‘an intentional and focused emphasis on the spatial or geographic aspects of justice and injustice. As a starting point, this involves the fair and equitable distribution in space of socially valued resources and the opportunities to use them’ (Soja, 2008).

It is therefore clear that apartheid sought to create socially unjust geographic spaces. This is affirmed by Thomas Chapman in reference to works by proponents of spatial justice theory ‘shows how inequality is a key component of postcolonial aspiring industrialist capitalist cities like Johannesburg, while Lefebvre (1991) looks more at the social production of space’ (Chapman, 2015). Space and indeed spatial justice are a function of the built environment as much as they are facilitated through municipal infrastructure and the equitable provision of municipal services.

MUNICIPAL INFRASTRUCTURE AND ITS MAINTENANCE

Municipal infrastructure clearly enhanced the apartheid city and advanced the white townships, while depressing the black townships. This is affirmed by Antina von Schnitzler (2018) who states that ‘in several ways, apartheid as a political project depended upon and was conjured into being by specific infrastructural modalities of power.’ She argues that ‘infrastructures became symbols, conduits, and forms of power, but they also shaped habits and the senses#...#Indeed, it could be argued that apartheid was precisely about infrastructures — institutional separation meant the use of separate infrastructures (from schools, to transport, public spaces, etc.) and the production of a racial economy’ (von Schnitzler, 2018).

On the definition of infrastructure Brian Larkin (2013) argues that ‘Infrastructures are built networks that facilitate the flow of goods, people, or ideas and allow for exchange over space’ (Larkin 2013, p. 328). Indeed, when thinking of the role municipal infrastructure in black township one immediately gets overwhelmed by the spatial injustice that is prevalent in the space. After all, “apartheid infrastructures had as one of their primary goals to prevent the emergence of a public of sorts, this was most obvious in the mass building of townships from the 1950s onward as spaces intentionally without important city features.” Antina von Schnitzler (2018).

The apartheid road infrastructure, in black townships, certainly created what Achille Mbembe terms necropolitics and at micro in black townships and this created death-worlds in that “the grids

of streets were planned such that they could be easily surveyed and closed off. In many townships, radial roads led to spaces built specifically to be used as potential weapon arsenals in case of protests.” Antina von Schnitzler (2018).

We also take into account that ‘urban planning becomes a potentially powerful governing tool with which to shape the people’s lives and subjectivities.’ (Yiftachel 2009, p. 9). Indeed, we cannot separate politics from infrastructure delivery and planning ‘infrastructure delivery has also been shown to be dependent on the ability of planning authorities’ (Baker and Hincks 2009, p. 4). Amina Nolte (2016) argues that ‘politics and ‘the political’ are always inherent to infrastructure, as an assemblage of ‘simultaneous forces, movements, agents and politics that co-produce the nature of contemporary urbanism’ (Nolte, 2016, p. 3).

The kind of spaces created by road infrastructure is essential; as contended by Harvey and Knox “we approach the question of what kinds of spaces road construction projects produce in a more open way: we are interested in how these infrastructures come to “compose the spaces of which they are a part” (Allen2011).” Harvey and Knox (2015).

However, my approach in considering the role of roads and stormwater (municipal infrastructure) in curating the postapartheid modern black township is to focus more on how, at a granular level is such infrastructure repaired and maintained. This is approach is based on the argument that “the basic object of infrastructure is so diverse and can be analysed in so many ways, the choice of methodology is a theoretical question. Are infrastructures technological systems, and the way to understand them a process of analysing networked machines? Are they financial instruments, practices of accounting and budgets, or management structures and organizational techniques?” Brain Larkin (2013) – I choose the latter as I believe the for object of (road and stormwater) infrastructure to have a role in curating the post-apartheid modern black township it needs to be equitably maintained across all townships in the municipal jurisdiction the inverse effect being the sustenance of the legacy of apartheid which is that of spatial injustice.

The Municipal Systems Act 32 of 2000, Chapter 8 Section 73 (2) (a) emphasizes equitability and accessibility in the delivery of municipal service, this legislation is key as it directly links the investment in municipal infrastructure and maintenance thereof. This is particularly important for the postapartheid modern township and its developmental local government paradigm shift which aims to undo the disproportionate capital spend per capita in the provision of municipal services between white and black townships.

Ivan Turok argues that when it comes to the investment of infrastructure ‘economies of scale have been sacrificed, there is under-utilisation of facilities in white areas and overloading in township’ (Turok, 1994, p. 12). He further substantiates this by highlighting the disproportionate capital spend per capita between in white and black townships under apartheid.

Mabena and Mahabir (2015) agree, arguing that the developmental mandate of the democratic local government should; 'takes the form of investments in local social and economic infrastructure, which are necessary for both extending services to previously disfranchised and poor communities and supporting growth' (Mabena & Mahabir, 2015, p. 1). However, this is burdened by the legacy of apartheid which 'complicates municipal capital investment requirements in South Africa.

Apartheid policies skewed the distribution of resources on racial grounds, with extreme under-investment by the former state in certain areas, which resulted in severe inequalities in access to quality services. Municipal capital expenditure seeks to remedy the service backlogs resulting from apartheid-era planning, as well as to invest in economic infrastructure required to sustain local communities' (Mabena & Mahabir 2015, p. 9).

It should be noted that my focus is on the repairs and maintenance budgets, which is operational in its nature, however this does not suggest that the postapartheid government has not invested in municipal infrastructure in previously underdeveloped and disadvantaged townships; such investment would fall under capital budget.

Palmer et al. (2017) which argued that by the end of 2008, 'there was a growing realisation that a rapid increase in access to services – infrastructure provision – was not matched with capacity to operate and maintain the resulting services: sustainability was an increasing concern' (Palmer et al., 2017, p. 16).

I therefore believe it is important to focus on the repairs and maintenance budget so that the roads built in the black townships do not remain so neglected and badly maintained that they reverse the gains of the 'developmental local government and sustain the fundamental spatial damage caused by apartheid on the built environment. A basic definition of repairs and maintenance from the National Treasury is that repairs are defined as 'physical action taken to restore the required function of a faulty item' (Treasury, 2016) and maintenance as 'all actions intended to ensure that an asset performs a required function to a specific performance standard(s) over its expected useful life by keeping it in as near as practicable to its original condition, including regular recurring activities to keep the asset operating, but specifically excluding renewal' (Treasury, 2016).

Having noted South Africa's unequal investment and maintenance of infrastructure Matsi Ntjatsane (2017) draws on the 2014 World Bank report to argue that 'As an essential part of investment and livelihood, adequate infrastructure promotes economic growth, reduces poverty, and improves delivery of health and other services' (Ntjatsane 2017, p. 7). Ntjatsane correctly argues that 'accumulation of well-maintained infrastructure is shown to have positive relationships with economic performance and development of any country' and further concludes that 'large infrastructure gap has been a result of maintenance neglect in many areas and inadequacy of maintenance budgets except for infrastructure operated and owned by state owned entities' (2017, p. 3).

CONCLUSION

The discussions articulated in this paper dictate that we think of the role of municipal infrastructure in curating post-apartheid modernity in black township. In my attempt to affirm this role I firstly affirm the Modern Heritage of Africa's view that 'infrastructure development and transport systems (of which roads and stormwater are an essential part) are activators of modernity'. It is not my intention to enter the scholarly debate about modernity, save to seek guidance from some of the pointers made by Achille Mbembe during the expert meeting (April 2021) of the Modern Heritage of Africa Symposium, where he presented on the Conceptualisation of the Modern Heritage of Africa. In this discussion, Mbembe states that modernity 'as defined by current scholars espouses and engages a whole lot of social changes which imply urbanisation. . .' (Mbembe, 2021).

I do however attempt to link the view that states that infrastructure and transport systems, in particular roads, are activators of modernism in line with what Mbembe states about modernity above.

If we accept that the apartheid city is our past and that apartheid greatly damaged the spatial environment in local government and that this was (one of) the main theses of apartheid, then we should surely agree that the antithesis to the spatial injustices remaining in local government is an attitude that envisions the provision of spatially just spaces in local government. The first signs of such an attitude should be an investment in roads that must be accompanied by sufficient and equitable repairs and maintenance budgets.

Secondly, since politics is always inherent to infrastructure, the attitudes of both policy makers and policy implementors cannot be that the legacy of colonialism was not all negative and/or that budgets are a mere administrative function or tool. In fact, a departure from the past should be a rupture. Such a departure needs all stakeholders to remember that roads 'deliver the basic conditions for modern living, although, as all scholars of modernity are aware, the benefits are uneven and unpredictable' (Harvey and Knox, 2015, p. 7). Modern living in spaces that were previously unjust needs disruption; such disruption is and has been the rollout of massive road infrastructure projects in black apartheid townships, and for such investments to have a meaningful impact on the creation of spatially just spaces, they need to be accompanied by the sufficient and equitable distribution of repairs and maintenance budgets. In the absence of such, these investments will remain a pothole stop-gap measure in the of curating post-apartheid modernity and spatial justice in black townships. **END**

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to acknowledge Prof. Noëleen Murray who is the Research Chair in Critical Architecture and Urbanism, Faculty of Humanities at the University of Pretoria, South Africa. Open access funding enabled and organized by ProjektDEAL.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There is no conflict of interest that I am aware of as the author of this manuscript.

REFERENCES

- Allemeier, J. (2021). *The capacity to deliver, fairly. Comments on Draft CID Policy and by-Law*. www.jodi.city
- Baker, M., & Hincks, S. (2009). Infrastructure delivery and spatial planning: The case of English local Development frameworks. *The Town Planning Review*, 80(2), 173–199.
- Barron, D., & Frug, G. (2006). International local government law. *The Urban Lawyer*, 38(1), 1–62.
- Chapman, T. P. (2015). Spatial justice and the Western areas of Johannesburg. *African Studies*, 74(1), 76–97.
- Fanon, F. 1961. *The wretched of the earth* (1st ed.). Francois Maspero. Grove/Atlantic, Inc.
- Harvey, P., & Knox, H. (2015). *Roads: An anthropology of infrastructure and expertise*. Cornell University Press.
- Larkin, B. (2013). The politics and poetics of infrastructure. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 42, 327–343.
- Lefebvre, H. (1991). *The production of space*. Blackwell.
- Mabena, N., & Mahabir, J. (2015). *Identifying The Funding Constraints in Municipal Capital Investments*. (pp. 245–270). N.T.S Africa.
- Mbembe, A. (2021). Conceptualisation of modern heritage of Africa. Modern heritage of Africa, Expert Meeting Session: 26 April 2021.
- Mokgethi, P. (2021). *Author's conversation with Papa Mogolo Mokgethi about Education and PhD Studies*. Soweto.
- Nolte, A. (2016). Political infrastructure and the politics of infrastructure. *City*, 20(3), 441–454. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13604813.2016.1169778>
- Ntjatsane, M.C. (2017). Financing of Infrastructure Maintenance in South Africa.
- Palmer, I.M., et al. (2017). Building a Capable State: Service Delivery in Post Apartheid South Africa.
- Simon, D. (1989). Crisis and change in South Africa: Implications for the Apartheid City. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 14, 189–206.
- Soja, E. W. 2008. *The city and spatial justice. Conference on spatial justice*. Nanterre, Paris.
- SPLUMA (2013). In D. R. D. A. L. Reform (Ed.), *Spatial planning and land use management act, 16 of 2013*. SPLUMA.
- The White Paper on Local Government (1998). In Cooperative Development of MOPAC (Ed.), *The white paper on local government 1998*. The White Paper on Local Government Republic of South Africa.
- Treasury, N. (2016). *CIDMS National Stakeholder Workshop*. CIDMS National Stakeholder Workshop.
- Turok, I. (1994). Urban planning in the transition from apartheid: Part 1: The legacy of social control. *The Town Planning Review*, 65, 243–259.
- von Schnitzler, A. (2018). Infrastructure, apartheid Technopolitics, and temporalities of ‘transition’. In N. Anand, A. Gupta, & H. Appel (Eds.), *The promise of infrastructure* (pp. 133–154). Duke University Press.
- Yiftachel, O. (2009). Theoretical notes on ‘gray cities’: The coming of urban apartheid? *Planning Theory*, 8, 13.
- Zille, H. (2017). *Legacy of colonialism not bad*. Twitter @hellenzille.