Urban Segregation in Post-apartheid South Africa
A.J. Christopher

Urban Stud 2001 38: 449
DOI: 10.1080/00420980120080031

The online version of this article can be found at:
http://usj.sagepub.com/content/38/3/449
Urban Segregation in Post-apartheid South Africa

A. J. Christopher

[Paper first received, January 2000; in final form, March 2000]

Summary. An analysis of the results of the 1996 census reveals a general decline in urban racial segregation levels in South Africa since the end of legal apartheid in 1991. However, the trends are not uniform with Whites remaining both more segregated and less open to change than the other groups. Africans have become more integrated, but the majority are constrained in their choice of residential options by the general levels of poverty. Asian and Coloured people have witnessed the greatest changes, with significant declines in segregation levels in the majority of cities as they begin to return to the areas from which they were forcibly removed in the previous 40 years. However, segregation levels remain exceptionally high and rapid integration may require government intervention.

Introduction

South Africa underwent highly significant political changes in the 1990s which affected all aspects of national life, not least through the abolition of statutory urban segregation. The creation of the apartheid city and its physical and its social characteristics have been extensively documented elsewhere (Christopher, 2000; Davies, 1981; Lemon, 1991; Western, 1996). By the late 1980s, the imminent demise of apartheid led to a number of speculative writings on the anticipated nature of the post-apartheid city (Beavon, 1992; Hart, 1989; Mabin, 1995; Smith, 1992; Swilling et al., 1991; Tomlinson, 1990). Since 1991, empirical studies of the breakdown of spatial apartheid suggested specific fields in which change has taken place (Davies, 1996; Kotze and Donaldson, 1998; Oelofse and Dodson, 1997; Saff, 1996). Desegregation has been identified as a feature of the post-apartheid city and this paper seeks to examine the extent to which this has taken place. The availability of small-area data from the October 1996 census offers the opportunity to examine trends in segregation levels in the 5-year period following the repeal of the accumulated mass of legislation, which enforced urban apartheid in June 1991. Indeed, it is the population censuses, as an historical body of data, which can be regarded as a means of monitoring both the rise of segregation and now the desegregation process.

The process of desegregation has been extensively studied in the US following the removal of formal and informal segregationary measures and the application of corrective affirmative action in the 1960s (see Massey and Denton, 1993). The breakdown of the rigid racial ghettos and the suburban-
sation of the minority population groups, notably the various Asian communities and the Hispanics, have been documented. These processes are essentially related to rising economic status and therefore economic integration into the host, White, community, although no single determining cause can be identified (Farley et al., 1993). However, race continues to play a significant role in the perpetuation of the segregation of the African-American population. Indeed, Massey and Denton (1987, p. 823), concluded that in regard to “the spatial behaviour of blacks and whites in American cities”:

Race continues to be a fundamental cleavage in American society. Yet it is not race per se … It is not race that matters, but black race.

In examining the South African situation, it may be expected that desegregation will operate at differential rates according to the group concerned, but also according to the nature of the specific urban environment. A limiting factor, inhibiting change, is the disparity in incomes between the various groups in South Africa which is remarkably wide, severely curtailing the opportunities for economic advancement on the part of the vast majority of the African population (South Africa, 1999). In the discussion which follows, it must also be remembered that although the White population under apartheid occupied the most extensive areas of South African towns and cities, it constitutes a diminishing minority, making direct comparisons with the US tenuous.

The 1996 Census

The 1996 census was conducted on a uniform basis throughout South Africa for the first time since 1970. The intervening national censuses of 1980, 1985 and 1991 omitted the territories of the nominally independent homelands of Bophuthatswana, Ciskei, Transkei and Venda. These states conducted their own censuses according to their own time-schedules and needs and so were only in broad terms compatible with the South African censuses (Bophuthatswana, 1991; Ciskei, 1988; Transkei, 1994; Venda, 1993).

In view of the change of government in 1994 and the demise of legal race classification, one of the more surprising aspects of the 1996 South African census was the retention of a question on racial classification, or population group. Political considerations, however, have always been significant with respect to the questions asked in censuses (Bulmer, 1986; Choldin, 1986). The retention of the population group question reflected the philosophy of the African National Congress and the concept promoted by the Government of National Unity (1994–99) of the ‘rainbow nation’ made up of diverse communities, rather than mono-tonal non-racialism (Allen, 1994). It furthermore reflected the official need for some numerical means of monitoring the legislated programmes of affirmative action, notably the Employment Equity Act of 1998, aimed at promoting the social and economic well-being of the previously disadvantaged communities.

The population group classification adopted by the census administration followed that of the earlier dominion and apartheid eras. A symbolic change was the order listing, with Africans listed first and Whites last—a reversal of previous practice. In this system, ‘Africans/Blacks’ were regarded as people descended from the indigenous population of the continent of Africa. ‘Whites’ were defined as descendants of immigrants from Europe and possessed recognisably light skins. This usage excluded people of mixed ancestry as it had been intended to do in the apartheid era. ‘Asians’ were defined as people who could trace their ancestry back to immigrants from the continent of Asia. The remaining, ‘Coloured’, group presented the greatest problem of classification. Under apartheid, this group had been remarkably heterogeneous, including in the main people of mixed ancestry, together with a number of distinct communities including the Cape Malays, the Griquas and other indigenous
peoples of the Western and Northern Cape (San and Khoikhoi) who had adopted the Afrikaans language in the colonial period.

The public protest against inclusion in the Coloured category by members of the latter groups, notably the Griqua leadership, resulted in the institution of a fifth group of ‘Others’, for census-returning purposes. However, in the official tabulations it was combined with those whose group was not specified on the census forms to produce the ‘Unspecified/Other’ category. It should be noted that membership of a group was determined by self-identification, not the legal documentary classification as it had been since 1951. In consequence, the results may not be strictly comparable with the 1991 and previous censuses. However, only 0.9 per cent of the total population of the country was returned as ‘Unspecified/Other’, suggesting a remarkably high level of adherence to the apartheid classification system (South Africa, 1999). The disaggregation of such an unsatisfactory ‘group’ did not take place, following the precedent of the analysis of the 1991 British census (Peach, 1996).

Calculating Segregation

The simplest and most widely used index was adopted to assess levels of segregation, namely that devised by Duncan and Duncan (1955). The index of segregation determines the difference in distribution between a given group population and the remainder of the population or, in graphic form, indicates what percentage of the group population would have to move to create a distribution identical to that of the city as a whole (Massey and Denton, 1988). The index is expressed on a scale from 0, representing complete integration, to 100, representing complete segregation. When interpreting the results, Kantrowitz (1979) found that index values of under 30 represented no more than random figures, and so could be taken to indicate populations that were in effect distributed in the same manner without any segregationary practices. A value above 30 was considered to be evidence that a degree of segregation was present, although it might represent no more than voluntary social differentiation. However, index values of over 70 were shown to represent structural segregation, where legal constraints and manipulation of the property market were significant factors enforcing segregation. In addition, comparative changes from one census to another could be the result of random numbers or the redrawing of enumeration tract boundaries. At least a five point change in index value was considered necessary to indicate a significant trend.

Data on population groups at enumeration-area (tract) level by magisterial district were supplied by Statistics South Africa in Pretoria, which conducted the national census. The census enumerators had been responsible for tracts containing approximately 120–250 households, or approximately 400–800 persons, similar in size to those drawn since 1951. In some cases, for example for blocks of flats or apartments, more than one enumerator had been employed and the data had to be aggregated subsequently. Standard-sized census tracts covered all parts of the urban areas. As a result of political unrest at the time of the 1991 census, the total populations of the African zones of each town or city had been calculated on the basis of sample surveys and aerial photography. Although the numbers determined by this method might appear to be dubious, the extreme segregation of the African areas shown in the 1985 census was such that segregation indices were scarcely affected by this innovation, allowing some broad intercensus comparisons to be made.

For the purposes of calculating the indices, all the urban enumeration tracts within a district were grouped, as the majority of districts were created to serve a single urban centre. In the cases of the four major metropolitan areas (Cape Town, Durban, Johannesburg and Pretoria) it was necessary to group districts where the boundaries cut through the functional areas. In other cases, two magisterial districts had to be linked where the previous government had drawn district boundaries on an ethnic basis, in
Table 1. Urban population of South Africa, 1996 (in 000s)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province</th>
<th>African</th>
<th>Coloured</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Western Cape</td>
<td>786</td>
<td>1 811</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>763</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>3 525</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Cape</td>
<td>1 426</td>
<td>405</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>297</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2 166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Cape</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>289</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>604</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free State</td>
<td>1 478</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>282</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1 837</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KwaZulu–Natal</td>
<td>2 105</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>768</td>
<td>517</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>3 550</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North West</td>
<td>952</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1 168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gauteng</td>
<td>4 998</td>
<td>277</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>1 639</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>7 133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mpumalanga</td>
<td>725</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>968</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern</td>
<td>306</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>385</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td>12 997</td>
<td>3 016</td>
<td>1 018</td>
<td>4 022</td>
<td>259</td>
<td>21 337</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Totals may not agree due to rounding. Only towns included in the study are included.
Source: South Africa (1999).

order to include the African suburbs within an independent or self-governing homeland. In this manner, the extent of the functional town or city was restored in, for example, the linking of the districts of King Williams Town and Zwelitsha (previously in Ciskei) in the Eastern Cape.

Two numerical constraints were introduced. First, urban areas with less than three enumeration tracts were ignored as the indices for such areas might be of limited validity. Secondly, indices were not calculated for population groups with less than 100 members in a district or metropolitan area. As a result of the latter constraint, no indices could be calculated for the urban areas in the majority of districts in the former African homelands which were effectively monoracial. This constraint also excluded a large number of very small totals, notably of Asians outside KwaZulu–Natal and Gauteng, although they were included in the totals when calculating segregation indices for the other groups. Thus, some 264 urban areas with an enumerated population of 21.3 million were included in the study (Table 1). They ranged in size from 2.15 million to 2022 (median size 21 681). The exclusions were small as only 0.5 million people were not included in the study.

Previous studies have indicated remarkably high levels of segregation in South African towns and cities at the end of the apartheid era (Christopher, 1990, 1994). Furthermore, most indices had still been rising in the 1985–91 intercensus period, indicating that—despite the apparent loosening of controls—the major restrictions of the apartheid legal system were still firmly in place. Thus the median index value for the White population in 1991 stood at 94.9, indicating almost total physical separation from the remainder of the population in virtually all urban areas. The other groups were scarcely more integrated with median values of 92.2 for the Asians, 90.9 for the Africans and 89.4 for the Coloureds. These figures compare with a value of 89 for Gary, Indiana, which recorded the highest Black segregation index at the time of the 1990 census in the US (Frey and Farley, 1996).

Results of the 1996 Census

In common with the results of successive US censuses, those revealed by the 1996 South African census indicate comparatively few major changes in segregation levels (Farley and Frey, 1994). However, the trends for the first time were almost uniformly downwards, indicating that the 1991 census coincided with the peak of effective residential segregation. The median values of all four group segregation indices fell. Those for the
Urban Segregation in South Africa

Table 2. Median urban indices of segregation 1996 (1991 values in parentheses)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province</th>
<th>African</th>
<th>Coloured</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Western Cape</td>
<td>81.9 (85.4)</td>
<td>84.2 (93.4)</td>
<td>69.9 (77.9)</td>
<td>93.4 (94.5)</td>
<td>56.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Cape</td>
<td>88.2 (94.7)</td>
<td>86.6 (92.2)</td>
<td>82.1 (85.9)</td>
<td>94.0 (96.5)</td>
<td>63.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Cape</td>
<td>81.5 (92.5)</td>
<td>81.0 (91.6)</td>
<td>a (a)</td>
<td>93.4 (96.5)</td>
<td>56.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free State</td>
<td>89.5 (94.6)</td>
<td>72.7 (83.6)</td>
<td>87.0 (a)</td>
<td>97.3 (97.8)</td>
<td>68.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KwaZulu–Natal</td>
<td>83.6 (81.6)</td>
<td>72.2 (82.8)</td>
<td>83.5 (94.4)</td>
<td>89.5 (90.8)</td>
<td>55.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North West</td>
<td>85.7 (90.8)</td>
<td>74.7 (83.6)</td>
<td>90.9 (96.0)</td>
<td>95.6 (94.8)</td>
<td>64.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gauteng</td>
<td>89.6 (93.8)</td>
<td>70.7 (90.4)</td>
<td>86.8 (95.6)</td>
<td>93.2 (94.2)</td>
<td>60.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mpumalanga</td>
<td>89.7 (93.4)</td>
<td>80.2 (89.0)</td>
<td>88.9 (97.1)</td>
<td>92.9 (94.3)</td>
<td>64.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern</td>
<td>85.7 (87.7)</td>
<td>73.5 (a)</td>
<td>90.3 (97.9)</td>
<td>90.3 (94.8)</td>
<td>59.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td>86.9 (91.5)</td>
<td>80.2 (90.3)</td>
<td>85.1 (94.4)</td>
<td>93.8 (95.7)</td>
<td>61.47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a under six values.
Source: Calculated by the author from the enumeration-area data supplied by Statistics South Africa.

White Segregation Levels

It was the White population which had instigated segregation, passed the legislation and controlled the coercive administrative apparatus which enforced it and benefited from the economic and social advantages which it brought. The impact of apartheid planning may be gauged from the rise in White indices of segregation for the five major metropolitan areas after 1951 (Table 3). It is therefore the progress of the integration of the White population which will determine the perceived desegregation of South African cities. As a result, most attention will be directed towards this group.

Segregation prior to 1991 had been backed by racial zoning laws which had originated in the 19th century. The most significant for the late apartheid era were the Group Areas Act (1950) and the Black Communities Development Act (1984), which provided for the compulsory zoning of all urban areas into exclusive group areas. These, together with the official racial classification of the population under the Population Registration Act (1950), underpinned the whole system. The White group areas were drawn very extensively, so that three-quarters of the area...
Figure 1. White indices of segregation in South Africa, 1996.

zoned under these laws were reserved for the White population. As a result, the vast majority of people who were forcibly removed from their homes under the legislation were removed from the areas proclaimed for exclusive White occupation. Indeed, only 2 per cent of the people removed were White. Desegregation has in large measure been concerned with the return of previously excluded groups to the former White group areas.

The most notable feature of the immediate post-apartheid era was the ability of the White population to maintain high levels of separation even when the legislation enforcing apartheid had been repealed (Figure 1). It should be noted that the Abolition of Racially Based Land Measures Act of 1991, while removing segregationary legislation, did not seek actively to reverse the effects of that legislation. Affirmative actions in the economic and political fields were not converted into schemes to undo the apartheid city. Even the government’s urban land restitution programme was stalled, with few properties restored to those forcibly removed during the apartheid era. Residential integration between 1991 and 1996 was essentially left to market forces, accompanied by occasional land invasions. As the vast majority of the African population was extremely poor and so unable to purchase property in the formerly White areas, it is scarcely surprising that the White population was able to defend ‘its’ territory with a high level of success.

An indication of the shift in population
distribution may be gauged from the figures for Port Elizabeth. In 1996, some 39 000 people (5.1 per cent of the total) lived in enumeration areas where the numerically dominant group represented under 75 per cent of the total. Such enumeration areas might therefore be regarded as ‘mixed’. In 1991 only 3000 people (0.5 per cent of the population) lived in such areas. Furthermore, by 1996 some 63 000 people (9.1 per cent of the population) lived outside the areas formerly designated for their group, compared with only 2.9 per cent 5 years beforehand (Table 4). It should be noted that several new effectively African mono-group housing areas in the former White and Coloured group areas accounted for much of this figure. Another marked feature was the lack of integration in the former African areas, which remain unaffected by movements noted elsewhere. Even municipally driven city integration programmes are directed towards the former non-African areas (Port Elizabeth, 1999).

The formerly White group areas were subject to change as other population groups entered specific niches of the housing market. The earliest and most prominent was the area of the central-city flat or apartment blocks, which offered conveniently situated accommodation in small units and which were usually available for rental rather than purchase. It had been this section of the market which had been the subject of the earliest breaches of the apartheid plan in the 1980s (Morris, 1994). The central areas of Johannesburg, followed by those of the other metropoles, were the destination of significant in-migration by members of the previously excluded groups (Maharaj and Mpungose, 1994). After 1991, the process accelerated to the extent that there was the distinct possibility in Johannesburg of the emergence of a central African ghetto, almost as segregated as those on the periphery created under the previous political dispensation (Guillaume, 1997). Thus Central Johannesburg recorded only 5.4 per cent of its 76 000 inhabitants as being White in 1996, while in the suburb of Hillbrow, dominated by apartment blocks, only 7.4 per cent of the population remained White (Figure 2).

Integration in the former White housing suburbs was slower as the turnover in the property market was lower and transfers of property were subject to greater constraints imposed by the limited availability of mortgage bond finance. The numbers of Africans, Coloureds and Asians with the financial backing to purchase property in these suburbs were limited. The 1996 census results underline the extreme poverty of the vast majority of the three excluded groups, particularly the Africans (South Africa, 1999). However, some movement has taken place, notably into poorer, and therefore more affordable, suburbs and new suburban developments where all the householders arrived together and so encountered no host-group hostility. Resistance to integration is still in evidence as witnessed by the development of

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Former group or development area</th>
<th>African population</th>
<th>Asian population</th>
<th>Coloured population</th>
<th>White population</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African</td>
<td>378 991</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1 033</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>381 952</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>282</td>
<td>5 729</td>
<td>960</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>7 211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coloured</td>
<td>22 758</td>
<td>2 492</td>
<td>166 316</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>193 872</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>21 894</td>
<td>1 784</td>
<td>11 010</td>
<td>130 740</td>
<td>167 128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>423 985</td>
<td>10 024</td>
<td>179 319</td>
<td>131 121</td>
<td>750 033</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Totals include ‘Other’ and unspecified.

Figure 2. Distribution of population in central Johannesburg, 1996.

White segregation levels declined significantly in only one-eighth of urban centres of the country between 1991 and 1996 (Figure 3). The provincial median segregation indices varied from 97.3 in the Free State to 89.5 in KwaZulu–Natal. It was only in these two provinces that segregation levels differed significantly statistically from the national profile, with urban centres significantly more segregated in the Free State and less segregated in KwaZulu–Natal. These findings reflect characteristics dating back to colonial times and are the result of differing approaches to the enforcement of segregation in the two provinces, dependent upon the layout of formal separate locations in the former and a more *laissez-faire* approach to the housing of domestic servants and workers upon the employers’ properties in the latter province. It needs to be emphasised that the differences are relatively small and certainly not noticeable to the vast majority of the inhabitants.

Farley and Frey (1994), in a study of US towns and cities between 1980 and 1990, came to the conclusion that a number of factors such as age of settlement, rate of growth, relative size of the group and dominant economic activity all contributed to differing degrees of racial separation. These will be examined for the White group.

In South Africa in 1996, no significant

---

**Figure 3.** Significant changes in segregation index values in South Africa, 1991–96.
relationship existed between size of urban place and White segregation levels. The White populations in small towns were just as segregated as those in large towns. This finding is in line with those determined in earlier censuses, both before and under apartheid (Christopher, 1990).

One of the most significant correlations in the US was between population growth and declining segregation levels. This reflected the importance of economic growth and the subsequent movement of population to regions of opportunity. In such regions, new suburbs were built and communities thus expanded or were formed with markedly lower levels of segregation than those experienced in areas of economic stagnation and decline. However, in South Africa, the rate of population growth between 1991 and 1996 of the urban centres was positively correlated with segregation level. Thus, rapidly growing towns were more segregated than more stagnant towns. This initially surprising result reflects the lack of economic growth in South Africa and the migration of poverty-stricken people from the rural areas into effectively segregated informal settlements on the urban margins. The migrants were therefore unable to purchase or occupy property in the former White group areas. The significance of this phenomenon is well illustrated in the Free State towns and elsewhere, which experienced substantial population growth, but no economic development (Krieger, 1997).

The proportion of Whites in the total population was found to correlate negatively with White segregation levels. Part of the explanation for this may be found in the rapid growth of the segregated African population on the peripheries of many urban places, thereby reducing the White proportion of the population and the relative importance of the more integrated former White group areas. It should also be noted that the number of Whites in the urban population of the country declined from approximately 4.6 million in 1991 to 4.0 million in 1996. However, this flight did not offer the opportunity for a significant transfer of White-owned properties to the previously excluded groups, unlike the experience of neighbouring Zimbabwe after independence in 1980 (Cumming, 1993). Only restricted central areas were virtually abandoned by Whites. Changes appeared to parallel those experienced by the more gradualist transformation of Namibian towns upon the repeal of apartheid legislation (Simon, 1986).

Farley and Frey (1994), in their US study, also suggested that older towns tended to be more segregated than more recently built towns. However, no significant difference was discernible between towns founded before and after the formation of the united South African state in 1910. The post-Union towns were predominantly developed to serve mining or heavy industrial projects. They were planned to be highly segregated, based on the use of migrant African labour housed in hostels and permanent White staff in separate suburbs. However, these highly segregated industrial towns were balanced by new towns built to serve irrigation farming schemes, where some workers were often housed on their employers’ plots. The resulting profile reflected the country as a whole.

Similarly, university towns, which had been found to be more integrated than the remainder in the US study, exhibited no significant difference in South Africa. This no doubt reflects the lack of a substantial number of towns dominated by universities as the institutions are generally situated in the main centres, where the ‘university factor’ would have been negligible. The exception is the case of some of the former African universities, where the White urban population was so low as to preclude the calculation of an index. Similarly, the most integrated group of towns in the US, those dominated by the military establishments, could not be distinguished in the South African context, although the successful integration of the South African National Defence Force would parallel the experience. Grahamstown, in the Eastern Cape, which could be classified as both a military and a university town, recorded an index value of
89.6, which could not be described as integrated.

Rather more surprisingly, towns situated entirely within the former homelands exhibited no significantly different level of White segregation from those in the remainder of the country. In view of the earlier (1970s and 1980s) removal of apartheid restrictions in the towns of the homeland which had received ‘independence’, it might have been expected that integration would have been more apparent. However, the persistence of semi-colonial expatriate enclaves negated this expectation, a feature reinforced by restrictive land ownership policies and the transient nature of the White population.

The most important finding concerned government towns. The White population in the 10 provincial and national capital cities was significantly less segregated than that in the remainder of the urban centres. This reflects the immediate empowerment of the new African political élite, which gained the financial means to move into the former White group areas. The new provincial and national governments together with the attendant restructuring of the civil services as a result of the political transformation resulted in the emergence of an African middle class in the administrative capitals. It was supplemented by the demand for attendant professional services supplied by African, Coloured and Asian lawyers, doctors, consultants, etc. The significant residential integration, which occurred in the formerly White areas, was therefore driven by the rapid transformation of the national and provincial governmental structures.

The White South African experience of desegregation thus differs markedly from that in the US. The lack of economic growth has negated the US relationship between population growth in the urban areas and integration. However, the impact of the significant changes of opportunities, particularly for Africans, for employment in both the national and provincial governments and the administrative bureaucracy was immediate. Hence the political driving-force behind integration is highly evident. But, future opportunities for economic advancement offered by a career in the civil service, threatened with massive rationalisation cuts, will be limited.

**African Segregation Levels**

Africans constitute the largest group within South African cities, yet they have until recently been subject to the most coercive and restrictive set of laws and regulations. Only in 1986 was free movement from the rural areas permitted, resulting in a rapid increase in the African urban population. Thus the African urban population increased by approximately 27 per cent between 1991 and 1996, compared with a decline of approximately 13 per cent in the White urban population. However, the majority of new housing schemes built in the period remained virtually racially exclusive, whether in the formal or informal sector. Even the land invasions of vacant areas tended to be undertaken by socially cohesive mono-racial groups (Gigaba and Maharaj, 1996). At the same time, the transformation of government structures as indicated above offered some opportunities for residential mobility by the new élite (Donaldson and van der Merwe, 1999). In 1996, municipal physical and social integration plans were still in their infancy and as yet unimplemented.

As a result, the median index value of African segregation only declined to 86.9, compared with 90.9 some 5 years beforehand. Only 37 per cent of comparable urban centres recorded significant (5-point) declines in African segregation levels, suggesting comparatively small changes in the African urban experience. The towns with significant declines were scattered across all the provinces, but were most noticeable in the Eastern Cape and least in KwaZulu-Natal.

On a provincial basis, Africans were significantly more segregated in the Free State and less segregated in KwaZulu-Natal and the Western Cape (Figure 4). This finding merely underlines the factors determining White segregation levels in the first
two provinces. The lower levels in the Western Cape reflected the scale of recent African migration to the province, from which they had been partially excluded under apartheid. Although Africans still represent a minority in the province, they increased by nearly 50 per cent between 1991 and 1996 to outnumber the White population. Lower segregation levels also reflect the lower priority accorded to the segregation of Africans from the numerically dominant Coloured population by White officials responsible for housing policy before 1994. The same pattern could be noted in the Northern Cape, but was not statistically significant.

Excluded from the discussion are many of the former homeland towns, which had become effectively mono-racial in the apartheid era, or as new towns were designed as such after 1950. These have experienced limited growth, or—as in the case of Botshabelo—no growth, being far from regions of perceived economic opportunity and therefore not attractive to rural–urban migrants (Krige, 1996). The largest homeland settlements were dormitory towns for nearby ‘White’ towns and, for the purposes of this study, where possible, they have been included within their functional urban area.

**Coloured Levels of Segregation**

The Coloured population experienced the most substantial decline in segregation levels between 1991 and 1996. The median index value fell from 89.4 to 80.2, with 61 per cent
of comparable indices for individual towns and cities declining significantly, including the numerically dominant Cape Town metropolis. It should be noted that 84.7 per cent of the Coloured population lived in the three Cape provinces in 1996.

On a provincial basis, the Coloured population was significantly more segregated in the Western Cape and the Eastern Cape and less segregated in the Free State and KwaZulu–Natal (Figure 5). It should be remembered that the two Cape provinces were the scenes of the major forced removals of the Coloured population during the implementation of the Group Areas Act plans after 1950. Towns were radically redesigned and people moved to fit the new residential plans. Undoing the imprint of the apartheid city in these provinces will be a particularly difficult task. In contrast, in the Free State, prior to the introduction of the new constitution in 1984, the separation of the Coloured from the African population had not been undertaken. The segregation of the two groups had commenced following the establishment of a separate House of Representatives for the Coloured population and hence the provision of separate services. However, this had not been completed by 1991, leaving the two groups still relatively mixed, but segregated as whole from the White population. In KwaZulu–Natal, the integration of the Coloured population with the numerically superior Asian group resulted in significantly lower index values than in the remainder of the country—a feature
which may be traced back to before the imposition of *apartheid*.  

**Asian Segregation Levels**

The Asian population also became substantially less segregated with a decline in the median index value from 92.2 to 85.1 between 1991 and 1996. Some 58 per cent of comparable towns recorded significant declines, including the key Durban metropolis. The number of indices calculated is lower than for the other three population groups, as the Asian population was restricted in many ways prior to 1984. As a consequence, 75.6 per cent of the Asian population still resided in KwaZulu-Natal. Therefore only 102 urban centres returned Asian populations of 100 or more in 1996 for the calculation of indices.

On a provincial basis, Asians were significantly less segregated in the Western Cape and more segregated in Mpumalanga (Figure 6). In the Western Cape, the Asian community exhibited relatively high levels of integration with the Coloured community, often the result of a lack of separate Asian group areas in the *apartheid* era. In Mpumalanga, the legacy of separation in ‘Asiatic Bazaars’ dating from colonial times ensured the maintenance of high index values. The relatively small numbers of communities of 100 people or more makes most

---

**Figure 6.** Asian indices of segregation in South Africa, 1996.
interprovincial comparisons for this group of limited worth.

Other and Unspecified Levels of Segregation

This heterogeneous group lacked any distinct identity. The Griqua leaders had requested a separate listing, but the community was estimated at only some 8000 members and was concentrated in the Northern Cape. Not surprisingly, Durban and Cape Town harbours recorded large numbers of people in this category, many of whom incidentally also did not speak any of the country’s 11 official languages. The remainder in this group were ‘unspecified’—namely, those who by accident or by design did not answer the population group question. It would appear that some enumerators were more diligent than others in securing a complete response coverage, as in a number of cases the majority of the population in an enumeration tract were returned as ‘unspecified’, while in other tracts everyone was classified according to the original classification. The group was found throughout the country, with substantially lower indices of segregation than the other groups. Furthermore, segregation levels were unrelated to size of settlement. Even in this group, the indices in the Free State were significantly higher and those in KwaZulu–Natal significantly lower than the rest of the country. The group, because of its origins, is not open to meaningful analysis without disaggregation.

Conclusion

For the first time in the present century, South African cities have become markedly less segregated in an intercensus period. However, this statement reflects the extremely high base index values of the late apartheid era from which the declines have to be measured. Significantly, the period 1991–96 does mark the beginning of a process leading towards societal reintegration after the enforced physical separation imposed by colonialism, segregationism and finally apartheid. When compared with the US in the second half of the 20th century, the impact of the removal of restrictive legislation and regulations has been more immediate and far-reaching in South Africa (Massey and Denton 1993).

There are a number of significant, if divergent, features to be distinguished in the process of desegregation in South African towns and cities. First, the White population, despite the loss of political power, remains the most highly segregated group and is being integrated at the slowest rate. This is surprising in view of the fact that integration is taking place in the physical space of the former White group areas. The emergence of new segregated African ghettos in the central city presents a partial explanation of this feature. Secondly, the African population is experiencing integration at a faster but still relatively slow rate, with only small numbers able to benefit from the transfer of political but not economic power. The lack of economic empowerment on the part of the vast majority of the African population is a major impediment to the process of desegregation. Thirdly, it has been members of the Coloured and Asian populations who have been able to exploit the opportunities offered by the repeal of segregationary laws to effect integration to the greatest extent. This reflects their intermediate economic and social status between the other two groups, and hence integration into both. It also reflects the ability of intermediate groups to escape the polarity of the black–white divide, as noted in the US. Fourthly, significant integration has been generated by the African-led government through control of the bureaucracy and the political élite. The impact of this change has been limited to a small range of towns and is not capable of replication throughout the country. Fifthly, desegregation appears to have revived some of the basic spatial features of the pre-apartheid South African city, with its continuum of suburbs from integrated to highly segregated. It is notable that the peculiar position of highly segregated African housing remains in place throughout.
The apartheid city in South Africa was created as a result of massive government intervention and expenditure which was spread over several decades. In 1991, the apartheid era legislation was repealed, but no affirmative programme of legislation aimed at reconstruction was put in its place. In view of limited governmental intervention in the urban planning process, and the essential inertia in the inherited physical structures, the progress made in desegregation in the following five years, up to the 1996 census, has been notable. The election of a more interventionist administration under President Thabo Mbeki in 1999 may achieve greater change in the next five years, if the majority of urban South Africans are to witness meaningful levels of residential integration around them. However, the main driving-forces leading to residential integration—namely, rapid economic development and the reduction of income disparities—appear to be difficult to achieve and may negate any state-driven plan.

Notes
1. The index of segregation (IS) is defined as:

\[
IS = \frac{0.5 \sum |x_i - z_i|}{1 - X/Z}
\]

where, \(X\) represents the total of sub-group \(X\) in the city; \(Z\) represents the total population of the city; \(x_i\) represents the percentage of the \(X\) population in the \(i\)th tract; and \(z_i\) represents the percentage of the total population in the \(i\)th tract.

2. The average size of the 44 336 enumeration areas into which the urban areas included in this paper were divided was 481 persons. This compares with 690 persons in 1985. No comparable figure could be calculated for 1991, owing to the peculiar nature of the census in the African areas.

3. The land restitution programme, aimed at restoring property rights to those who had lost them under racially based land laws, had achieved little in the urban areas by the time of the census in 1996. Thus no integrated communities had been reconstructed under the programme. The offer of financial compensation instead of land in the restitution process further reduced the possibility of recreating integrated suburbs.

4. Between 1970 and 1991, the racial zoning of a census enumeration area was indicated in its number, making the calculation of totals for the various group and Black development areas relatively straightforward. Understandably, this practice was abandoned in 1996, making broad comparisons more difficult to determine.

5. The Mann–Whitney \(U\) test for significance was adopted for comparisons between the index levels in different provinces, and different urban forms.

6. Spearman’s rank correlation coefficient was calculated for paired urban attributes, and its significance assessed using a \(z\) score.

7. The Asian–Coloured index of dissimilarity in KwaZulu–Natal (71.1) was one of the lowest intergroup indices in the country and reflected earlier patterns. In 1985, it had stood at 66.9.

8. Census tracts 1030417 (Cape Town harbour) and 5010064 (Durban harbour).

References


