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Exploring 'difference'  
in place-making  
The case of bad buildings  
and residential  
regeneration in the  
inner city of Johannesburg,  
South Africa

Elsa Soussan Burzynski

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**Abstract.** Urban regeneration processes have often been criticised for being insensitive to the needs of vulnerable urban dwellers inhabiting the places to be reinvented. A common argument puts forward their shaping by neoliberal thinking and their endeavour to deliberately displace the poor. This argument tends to overlook the complexities surrounding regeneration processes, as well as the fact that these processes sometimes occur in an overall pro-poor context. In this respect, how can one explain the apparent insensitivity to or inability to meet the needs of the poor through regeneration?

This paper proposes an alternative perspective, focusing on the relation between institutional place-making practices and

vulnerable residents' place-making practices through the lens of the concept of "difference". Drawing on the case of residential regeneration in the inner city of Johannesburg, it argues that the apparent insensitivity or inability to respond to vulnerable urban dwellers' needs can be (partly) read as related to the ways in which the latter's place-making practices are constituted as different in specific planning configurations, and subsequently addressed through planning strategies and interventions. It ultimately points at operationalising a new planning imagination for urban regeneration, one that builds and engages with different place-making practices in a positive and radical manner.



# Content

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<b>1. Introduction</b>	7
<b>2. A selective exploration of the concept of difference: towards a working definition</b>	9
2.1. Difference: from a socio-cultural perspective towards a place-making perspective	9
2.2. From horizontal differences towards vertical differences	10
2.3. A personal reading of the concept of difference	11
<b>3. Everyday spatiality, urban regeneration and difference: towards a new “planning imagination”</b>	12
3.1. Exploring vulnerable urban dwellers’ place-making practices	12
3.2. Urban regeneration in the South: towards the production of difference and its subsequent treatment in praxis	13
3.3. A new planning imagination for urban regeneration	14
<b>4. Exploring space/place in the inner city of Johannesburg: a focus on housing and the bad buildings</b>	16
4.1. Contextualising bad buildings	16
4.2. Bad buildings and the politics of becoming	17
<b>5. An analysis of the production and treatment of difference in two urban regeneration policy frameworks</b>	21
5.1. Reframing the approach to residential regeneration in Johannesburg	21
5.2. From the deeply exclusionary production of difference to the politics of displacement: the case of the ICRS (2003)	22
5.3. From the reframed production of difference towards (limited) hybridity: the case of the ICC (2007)	24
<b>6. Conclusion</b>	27
<b>7. References</b>	28

## List of figures.

- 4.1. Map of the seven new regions of Johannesburg after the 2006 administrative reform. Source: COJ, 2006.
- 4.2. Map of region F. Source: COJ, 2006.
- 4.3. A story of “constant displacement”: S. S.’s housing trajectory in Yeoville, including his experience of bad buildings on Becker Street and Bezuidenhout Street. Source: adapted from Benit-Gbaffou, Doerman, Matsipa, 2010.
- 5.1. The five pillars underpinning the ICRS. Source: COJ, 2003.

## List of acronyms.

- COJ – City of Johannesburg (government entity)  
ICC – Inner City (Regeneration) Charter  
ICRS – Inner City Regeneration Strategy



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# 1. Introduction

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Urban regeneration processes – including residential regeneration – have often been criticised as being openly insensitive to the needs of vulnerable urban dwellers inhabiting the areas to be regenerated and as aiming to “sweep the poor away” (Watson, 2009b) through the deliberate socio-demographic restructuring of whole areas. Such critiques often associate urban regeneration with an “omnipresent” and “omnipotent” neoliberal agenda (Clarke, 2008:135), including in the cities of the South. As an example, while exploring the case of Ankara, Güzey defines urban regeneration as “a government-assisted gentrification project” (2009:27), whereby “gentrification becomes a positive and necessary [...] strategy in the process of designing space according to global market rules” while leading to the “alienation of low-income groups” (ibid:28). Similar critiques have been formulated regarding urban regeneration in China (Zhang, 2010) as well as in South Africa (Winkler, 2010; Miraftab, 2007). There is little doubt that some urban regeneration processes do lead to the alienation of vulnerable urban dwellers. However, when systematically relating these outcomes to a deliberate anti-poor project, one tends to overlook the complexities characterising the areas to be regenerated and thus surrounding urban regeneration processes. In addition, in some countries, urban regeneration processes occur in an overarching pro-poor planning and governance context, and sometimes display an emerging commitment to responding to the needs of vulnerable urban dwellers. This is visible in a limited paradigm shift regarding urban regeneration, towards a “sustainability” agenda – whereby sustainability is multidimensional – and towards the collaboration with civil society organisations (Güzey, 2009:29).

The case of urban regeneration in the inner city of Johannesburg, South Africa, unveils this paradox. In an overall pro-poor context, and while having partly recognised the importance of addressing vulnerable residents’ needs, some of the outcomes of regeneration processes have still been detrimental to the latter or unable to meet their needs. This is particularly the case regarding residential regeneration and the treatment of so-called “bad buildings”<sup>1</sup> which have been widely criticised for leading to the alienation of their residents. There is therefore a need to explore an alternative approach to this apparent insensitivity to or inability to respond to the needs of vulnerable residents of bad buildings, moving beyond a critique of residential regeneration as deliberately anti-poor and driven by a uniform neoliberal

agenda. This endeavour echoes Lipietz’s argument:

*“current urban regeneration initiatives in Johannesburg’s inner city are not so much the result of a deliberate neo-liberal policy agenda being pushed forward in a purposive and effective manner but rather, that they are the unfortunate effect of un-imaginative responses to (desperate attempts at times at) dealing with contingency – in a highly complex, fast-changing, and chaotic (let alone violent) inner city environment”* (Lipietz, 2004:2)

Lipietz moreover sketches another way to analyse urban regeneration in Johannesburg (see also Simone, Gotz, 2001a.). Indeed, while putting the stress on the City of Johannesburg’s (COJ) attempts at dealing with informal traders and taxi drivers through urban regeneration, she highlights the fact that, despite pro-poor commitments, the COJ has not been able to deal effectively with their complex, little understood place-making practices (Lipietz, 2004:8-9). Building on this analysis, I seek to explore an approach to residential regeneration which focuses on the relations between planning actors’ and vulnerable urban dwellers’ place-making practices. I furthermore use the concept of difference in order to analyse such relations, arguing that the apparent insensitivity to or inability to meet the housing needs of vulnerable residents of bad buildings is partly related to the ways in which the latter’s place-making practices are produced as different and, as such, addressed in praxis. In other words, I argue that the potentially detrimental effects of residential regeneration on vulnerable residents can be explained in relation to the production of difference and the subsequent framing of planning interventions.

The second chapter of this paper outlines selected authors’ understanding of the concept of difference in order to progressively sketch a personal working definition of the latter. Chapter 3 proposes a broad application of this concept to urban regeneration and place-making, and concludes by framing a new “planning imagination” (Sandercock, 2004) for urban regeneration. The last two chapters explore the case of residential regeneration in the inner city of Johannesburg through the lens of the concept of difference. In this respect, chapter 4 provides some elements of (spatialised) context regarding the inner city, bad buildings and the related place-making practices.

Chapter 5 ultimately focuses on the discursive analysis of two policy documents – the Inner City Regeneration Strategy and the Inner City Charter – while putting the stress on the production of difference and its subsequent

treatment in praxis, on the (actual or potential) detrimental effects on vulnerable urban dwellers, and on the related need for a radicalised “planning imagination” for urban regeneration.

#### *NOTES TO CHAPTER 1*

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1. In the remainder of this paper and for clarity purposes, the expression “bad buildings” will be used without inverted com-

mas, although it is very specific to urban regeneration policy documents and official statements and can be questioned.

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## 2. A selective exploration of the concept of difference: towards a working definition

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This chapter provides the conceptual underpinnings that will inform the analysis of the relation between planning actors' and vulnerable urban dwellers' place-making practices. It explores the concept of difference which is thought to bear a heuristic value in order to analyse such relations and ultimately provides a working definition of this concept that will be taken through the remainder of this paper.

### 2.1. Difference: from a socio-cultural perspective towards a place-making perspective

**Differences/identities: a socio-cultural perspective.** Cities have been described as sites par excellence where a diversity of individuals and groups are thrown together, sites of possible creative encounters as well as sites of anxieties related to this "thrown-togetherness", sites of anonymity as well as of potentially intense relations. These paradoxes and tensions are all inherently linked to and contribute to the proliferation of differences in urban settings. It is however only in the past few years that planning theorists and practitioners have been exploring this notion of difference. This has been mainly done through a socio-cultural lens, drawing on the inputs of postcolonial, postmodernist and cultural studies, as well as of feminist, queer and psychoanalytic theories (Fincher, Jacobs, 1998; Sandercock, 1998). This has implied moving away from a focus on class-based attributes in order to expand the "range of identified 'groups' whose urban circumstances might be examined and theorised, and whose particular and diverse forms of marginalisation or advancement might be publicised" (Fincher, Jacobs, 1998:3). There has thus been a renewed interest for planning projects – of "cosmopolitan development" (Safier, 1996), "utopian thinking" for the postmodern city (Friedmann, 2002), "cosmopolis" or "mongrel city" (Sandercock, 1998, 2003) – which are all partly or totally oriented towards turning "difference [into] a category of analysis within planning theory" (Sandercock, 1998:109), whereby difference relates primarily to socio-cultural attributes. For example, Sandercock draws on gender, ethnic/"racial" and sexual differences, differences related to social status, to ability, to one's place of origin, with a clear focus on differences related to ethnicity and place of origin. In this respect, the socio-cultural approach to difference implies a deep connection with the concept of identity.

However, the couple difference/identity is not seen as pre-given or essentialised, fixed or natural. Rather, the socio-cultural approach to difference puts forward a concern for the "socially constituted subject" (Fincher, Jacobs, 1998:7). In this respect, both identities and differences have come to be seen as relational, articulated through localised and contingent discourses which are "embedded in relational frameworks of power, in institutions and in structures of governmentality" (ibid). In other words, individuals and groups do not hold homogenous, pre-existing identities or differences; rather, their identities/differences are assigned, claimed or negotiated through discourses which reflect and materialise power relations. The definition of a group of urban dwellers as different thus echoes such power relations, and so does the process of claiming to be different. This pre-eminence of power relations and of their materialisation in discourses in defining who is different and/or in claiming to be different is reflected in Sandercock's choice of a fluid terminology: "minorities", "others", "underclass [...] status", "voices of the borderlands", "subaltern" (1998, 2003). Ultimately, focusing on the couple identity/difference is particularly salient in order to disaggregate urban populations. For example, although Sandercock does not deny the importance of economic conditions in producing differences, she puts forward the fact that cities are the scenes for multilayered forms of differences that encompass, while moving beyond, material conditions. Individuals and groups are thought to hold intersecting, multiple and contingent identities, and therefore can be attributed or claim equally intersecting, multiple and contingent differences.

### A place-making perspective on "difference".

However, even when one attempts at handling the concepts of identity/difference with care, the latter always threaten to be reified or manipulated, to lead to forms of identity politics and to particularistic claims. For example, Watson (2002; 2007) considers that Sandercock's over-emphasis on questions of identities can be sensitive in the Sub-Saharan African context and has two potential consequences: first, exacerbating divisions in contexts where identities are easily manipulated (see ethnicity-related conflicts), and second, potentially minimising redistributive issues. In this respect, she allows for a reframing of the notion of difference, in a way that is only latent in Sandercock's work. Indeed, Sandercock acknowledges that some socio-cultural identities/

differences are inherently linked to a specific ontological condition – what she calls a “sense of living on/in the borderlands” (1998, chapter 5), or, in other words, a sense of being “in-between” (Bhabha, 1994). The latter implies different “ways of knowing”, which leads her to put an “epistemology of multiplicity” forward (2003:76). It further implies different “ways of acting”, which she relates to an “emancipatory politics” (1998:121) and to different urban dwellers’ agency to challenge and reorient conventional governance and planning practices. “Ways of acting”, in Sandercock’s terminology, therefore refers to the possibility of deliberately mobilising as different in order to foster urban change.

However, Sandercock does not explore those everyday “ways of acting” that do not explicitly bear a political project – that is, the multiple routines, behaviours, experiences, activities that are enacted by fractions of urban dwellers in the “everyday urban life” spaces (Amin, 2006:1013). On the other hand, Watson and her commentators explicitly displace the locus of difference from “ways of being” to those everyday practices. The latter furthermore encompass ways of making space/place (i.e. place-making practices), building on Lefebvre’s understanding of space as socially produced (1991). In this respect, Watson and her commentators no longer relate difference to socio-cultural attributes, but rather to the multiple place-making rationalities “of those who are attempting to survive, materially and culturally, in what are often regarded as alien places” in the cities of the South (Watson, 2007:216) – those place-making rationalities “that have emerged as the subalterns have found ways to live in circumstances of marginality and domination” (Harrison, 2006:325).

## 2.2. From horizontal differences towards vertical differences

**Difference: located among urban dwellers.** Ever the past few years, a lot of attention has been directed towards the dilemmas and tensions which stem from and reinforce the proliferation of differences in the shared spaces of the cities. There have been widespread concerns regarding the possibility to operationalise a politics of relatedness in heterogeneous urban environments (Sandercock, 2003; Friedmann 2002; Amin, 2006), regarding the geographies of anxiety as well as the open conflicts (Safier, 1996) that stem from this heterogeneity. All these concerns focus on horizontal differences, that is, on differences among various fractions of urban dwellers, while usually displaying a socio-cultural approach to difference. Focusing on horizontal differences has led many authors to put forward the management of the coexistence of diverse fractions of urban dwellers as a crucial issue at stake in contemporary cities – in other words, “how can we, stropky strangers, live together without doing each other too much violence?” (Sandercock, 2003:127).

These authors are therefore interested in the role of planning in managing this coexistence and in operationalising a “productive politics of difference”, one which attempts at making the valuing of differences possible while not fragmenting further the urban social realm (Sandercock, 1998:109; see also Safier, 1996; Friedmann, 2002; Amin, 1997; Sandercock, 2003). This implies recognising that planning has long been insensitive to some horizontal differences. Beyond, Sandercock (2003) recognises that planning itself has served to dominate and oppress different fractions of urban dwellers, whether it be in relation to the hegemonic epistemology of planning, to its hegemonic history, and to planning interventions themselves.

However, her focus remains on how planning has been dealing with differences among urban dwellers and on how planners have sometimes been translating such horizontal differences into interventions. Planning thus remains seen as a potential tool to either enhance divisions among urban dwellers or to promote a pluralist, democratic “city of differences” (Fincher, Jacobs, 1998). In this respect, Sandercock does not explore explicitly the existence of vertical differences.

### **Difference: located between urban dwellers and institutional actors.**

Watson (2006) is more explicit about the two-fold location of difference, while focusing on place-making rationalities. She indeed considers that difference is located both among fractions of urban dwellers (“inter-group”, *ibid*:33) and between urban dwellers and institutional actors. She puts forward the existence of widening “‘state–citizens’ differences, referring to the relationship between the hegemonic technical, managerial and political systems through which public authorities manage their relationships with their consumers/citizens, and the everyday needs and priorities of people” (*ibid*), and “planners–citizens” differences. Both are related since, in many contexts, planning is deeply embedded in the (local) state. She therefore considers that difference lies between fractions of urban dwellers’ and institutional actors’ place-making rationalities.

Indeed, for Watson and others (Winkler, 2011; Harrison, 2006; Pieterse, 2011), institutional actors (including planners) in the cities of the South often display a liberal ethos deeply rooted in Western thought. This ethos entails “protecting and serving ‘the public interest’, or public morality, through planners’ obligations to ‘the public’, as well as residents’ obligations to each other” (Winkler, 2011:2). It assumes both a homogeneous public good and individual freedom. These assumptions have been criticised for being at odds with the realities of everyday life in the cities of the South. More precisely, this liberal ethos is thought to lead to important vertical differences between the everyday place-making practices displayed by fractions of urban dwellers and those place-making practices enacted by institutional actors. Furthermore, Watson puts forward the influence of a generalised neoliberal turn in planning and governance, whereby neoliberalism is conceptualised as a “technology of

governing 'free subjects'" (Ong, 2006:4) which:

*"adds to the range and sources of difference: between a citizenry which still adheres to values compatible with liberal democracy [...] and a neoliberal rationality which holds to market values in all institutional and social action. Even more deeply is this difference felt by those whose world-view is shaped by traditions outside of liberalism [the latter including, for instance, vulnerable urban dwellers, I am adding]"* (Watson, 2006:37).

In other words, according to Watson, the neoliberal rationality in planning and governance potentially deepens vertical differences between fractions of vulnerable urban dwellers' and institutional actors' place-making practices.

### 2.3. A personal reading of the concept of difference

**Deepening Watson's approach to vertical, place-making differences.** Drawing on the aforementioned theoretical discussions, I will now present a personal definition of the concept of difference. In the context of this paper, following Watson, difference is related to place-making practices. More precisely and in relation to the core argument, this paper focuses on vertical differences, while acknowledging the relevance of horizontal differences. However, Watson and other authors concerned with vertical differences between forms of place-making do not explicitly address the actual production of such differences, which represents an important limitation to their approach. I therefore seek to explore how difference is relationally and "discursively constituted" (Fincher, Jacobs, 1998:7) at the interface between planning actors' place-making practices and vulnerable urban dwellers' place-making practices. More precisely, I focus on the production of difference through planning actors' discourses, rather than on differences that might be claimed by fractions of urban dwellers. Furthermore, the discursive production of difference is thought to be selective: planning actors' choice to focus on specific narratives relies on selected forms of knowledge, as well as on specific values and beliefs put forward by the latter, thereby leading to the definition of some place-making practices enacted by some fractions of urban dwellers as different. It is moreover thought to be contingent, enacted in specific planning configurations (such as a street trading management project, a housing policy document etc). In this respect, difference is also highly contingent and contextually specific, which implies that there is no such thing as inherently different place-making practices. Eventually, the production of difference is thought to be inevitable but variable. We are all constantly producing difference, drawing distinctions between things, people, spaces/places, objects, in comparison to others. Producing difference represents a

way to give sense to the world around us, and to relate to and position oneself in this world. This applies to institutional and planning actors, who also inevitably produce difference in relation to other urban actors' place-making practices. However, if difference always bears a comparative meaning, it does not necessarily bear a negative or exclusionary meaning. It can be produced in more or less exclusionary ways or even in ways that allow for its valuing. Beyond, the extent of difference between place-making practices is variable, depending on planning actors' discursive strategies and the choices of narratives at play.

### From the production of difference towards the treatment of difference in praxis.

But difference, as analysed in this paper, is not only a purely discursive matter. Indeed, place-making practices that are produced as different in varying ways can be treated, in planning praxis, in equally varying ways, which highlights the nexus between knowledge, values and beliefs (underpinning the production of difference), discourses (through which difference is produced) and interventions (through which difference is addressed in practice). In this perspective, authors displaying post-structuralist and post-positivist approaches to discourse prove particularly useful. Indeed, they argue that there are "societal implications [to] how language is used" (Hastings, 1998:192) or, in other words, that the "deployment of language has [...] social effects" (Hastings, 2000:132). In this respect, there is a connection between how planning issues are constructed and enacted through discourse and how they are addressed in praxis.

This encompasses a connection between the ways in which vulnerable urban dwellers' place-making practices are constituted as different in specific planning configurations and the ways in which such place-making practices are treated in praxis. In other words, the varying production of difference – to varying extents and in a more or less exclusionary fashion – contributes to framing how those forms of place-making defined as different are to be addressed in practice. In some planning configurations, the exclusionary production of difference can lead to the oppression and domination of those place-making practices constituted as different. Such place-making practices can be rendered invisible, erased, physically or symbolically eradicated. However, in other configurations, the production of difference can make possible the valuing of the latter, leading to the possibility of creative engagement and hybridity. The latter has been defined as the process "whereby an exchange between two (or more) existing cultures produces new cultural forms and practices" (Harris, 2008:18), beyond "the binary representation of social antagonism" (Bhabha, in Fernandez, 2010:69). In the context of this paper, it can be reframed as the process whereby the encounter between planning actors' place-making practices and vulnerable urban dwellers' different place-making practices leads, in praxis, to new forms of planning interventions. This process potentially challenges and subverts power structures (Harris, 2008:20) and carries the possibility of change (Harrison, 2006:325).

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### 3. Everyday spatiality, urban regeneration and difference: towards a new “planning imagination”<sup>1</sup>

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In this chapter, I will use the concept of difference as defined above as a lens to analyse urban regeneration in the cities of the South. This implies, first, exploring those place-making practices enacted by vulnerable urban dwellers inhabiting the areas to be regenerated. This further implies exploring urban regeneration as a form of institutional place-making. In doing so, special attention will be directed to the narratives that often underpin such processes, showing how the selective focus on such narratives participates in the production of difference and putting the stress on the implications of this process in practice. Ultimately, I will briefly introduce a new planning imagination stemming from this analysis of urban regeneration processes.

#### 3.1. Exploring vulnerable urban dwellers’ place-making practices

**Putting everyday spatiality on the agenda.** Over the past years, there has been a renewed attention for the specific ways in which cities of the South function for fractions of their population (Dovey, 2010; De Boeck, 2011; Simone, 2001a, 2003a, 2003b, 2004a, 2004b, 2006; Bayat, 1997; Nuttall, Mbembe, 2008). These authors have sought to develop an understanding of the “embodied praxis of urban life” (De Boeck, 2011:271) and, in doing so, they have proposed quasi ethnographic accounts of residents’ everyday practices, tactics and strategies. They have put forward vulnerable urban dwellers’ agency, recognising their often harsh living conditions while arguing that “no amount of brutality can quite stop the insistence of ordinary people, that they will not postpone their exercise of the ‘capacity to aspire’” (Appadurai, Breckenridge, 2008:354). In other terms, “while it is undeniable that concerns of survival constitute the main preoccupations of the urban disenfranchised, they also strive to move forward and improve their lives, however calmly and quietly” (Bayat, 1997:56). This focus on vulnerable urban dwellers’ agency participates in an overall project to move beyond narratives of crisis regarding the cities of the South (Mbembe, Nuttall, 2004:353; Simone, 2004a:1). These authors have furthermore focused on the spatial dimensions of everyday urban life, analysing how space/place is produced by vulnerable urban dwellers, and how their production of space/place contributes to their capacity to survive and to “aspire”. They therefore, implicitly or explicitly, draw on Lefebvre’s under-

standing of the production of space as occurring at the intersection between the “perceived space” (spaces of representation), the “conceived space” (representations of space) and the “lived space” (the realm of embodied spatial experiences and practices; Lefebvre, 1991; Roy, 2009a:825). These approaches focusing on everyday spatiality thus represent a powerful framework for analysing those place-making practices enacted by vulnerable urban dwellers that are potentially produced as different.

**Introducing the politics of becoming.** The cities of the South, including Sub-Saharan African cities, are sites where multiple fractions of urban dwellers navigate in order to leverage limited opportunities and to minimise constraints in equally multiple ways. This encompasses producing space/place in peculiar, often uninstitutionalised ways that partially work for them. For Bayat, these peculiar place-making practices constitute the “quiet encroachment of the ordinary”, defined as the “silent, patient, protracted, and pervasive advancement of ordinary people on the propertied and powerful in order to survive hardships and better their lives” (1997:57). For Simone (2001a, 2003a), they constitute the politics of “becoming”<sup>3</sup>, which encompasses vulnerable urban dwellers’ ways of making space/place in fluid, unstable and sometimes uncertain ways. This notion of becoming conveys the idea of space/place as constantly in the (re)making, which appears at several level.

**Circulations.** In African cities and other cities of the South, lived space/place can stretch beyond an isolated location in the city towards a constellation of locations within and beyond the city. In this respect, fractions of urbanites’ “sense of place does not necessarily, or even usually, coincides with a specific territory or locality” (Simone, 2003b:226). They indeed often develop webs of relations that extend beyond both the area in the city where they live and the city as a whole, to encompass other cities, other areas within the country and even other countries. Social networks and socio-economic activities therefore move beyond boundaries. Furthermore, these fractions of urban dwellers might imagine or intend to move from where they currently are located, in search for further opportunities. In the case of internal or transnational migrants, they might want to go back home or to reach yet another destination (Landau, Haupt, 2007; Nyamnjoh, 2006; Burzynski, 2010). In the case of “na-

tive” residents, they might dream about future migrations (Simone, 2006). Fractions of urban dwellers thus experience actual or imagined forms of circulation, attempting at “reaching the larger world” in their daily life and making space/place beyond and in-between locations (Simone, 2003b).

**Reterritorialisations.** Another characteristic of the politics of becoming relates to the fact that fractions of urban dwellers “operate without clearly delineated notions of how the city is to be inhabited and used” (Simone, 2004b:407). They often “reterritorialise” (De Boeck, 2011:267) parts of the cities, using infrastructures, land and public spaces “out of their normal or legitimate frameworks of circulation and use” (Simone, 2006:357). Simone’s concept of piracy and Dovey’s concept of slippage both convey the idea of this “fluidity of forms, practices and meanings” in relation to urban spaces (Dovey, 2010:167): space/place becomes malleable, not fixed in predetermined categories of usages and frameworks of meanings.

**Invisibility.** Eventually, the politics of becoming often entails some degree of invisibility/illegibility. The ways in which fractions of urban dwellers use and make spaces/places, the activities and relations occurring in and shaping such spaces/places, often need to be hidden to be effective, even in the case of non criminal activities. One can take the example of street trading as one of such non criminal activities: those street traders who do not possess trading licenses will seek to remain invisible to police authorities (Burzynski, 2010:77). Beyond, some fractions of these urban dwellers might need to be, themselves, invisible, both to authorities (for example, illegal migrants) and to other urban dwellers (see the case of transnational migrants in environments characterised by high levels of xenophobia; *ibid*:61).

This politics of becoming is especially enacted in the areas targeted for urban regeneration in the cities of the South. I will now turn to analyse such planning processes, focusing on how this politics of becoming is potentially produced as different and on its subsequent treatment in praxis.

### **3.2. Urban regeneration in the South: towards the production of difference and its subsequent treatment in praxis**

**Defining urban regeneration.** The urban regeneration trend coincides with an “increased interest for the qualities of place” (Madanipour, 2001:154) and with a spatial turn in planning. It has been widely applied in Western Europe and in the United States from the 1970s onward and subsequently in many cities of the developing world

(Bremner, 2000). It mainly targets urban areas which have undergone important social, economic, physical transformations that are often considered as participating in a form of urban decline. At first, urban regeneration was focusing on the physical manifestations of urban decline (*ibid*:187). It however evolved towards less physically-oriented approaches, taking into account housing provision, commercial initiatives, urban management, crime reduction, service provision, leisure-oriented initiatives, as a way to capitalise on and strengthen existing place-based assets, and to promote place attractiveness and competitiveness. Ultimately, urban regeneration is increasingly moving towards a “sustainability” agenda: “regeneration is not only physical, but [...] [implies] a holistic approach defined in a time and place-specific strategic perspective which includes the social, economic and environmental spheres” (Güzey, 2009:29). It should seek to “improve the economic, physical, social and environmental conditions of deprived areas” (Akkar Ercan, 2011:295). These successive rationales are furthermore supported by specific institutional arrangements, with a strong focus on public-private partnerships and more recent attempts to include civil society organisations through “multi-sector urban regeneration partnerships” (Güzey, 2009:29).

However, despite these paradigm shifts, urban regeneration can still be defined as a form of place-making which aims at “redefining an old [place]” on renewed terms (Madanipour, 2001:155). It seeks to reshape a place’s appearance, qualities, meanings and uses: urban regeneration “tells of the transformation, reformulation and re-imagining of an urban landscape” (Bremner, 2000:190). This re-imagining often relies on selected narratives, as planning discourses underpinned by specific knowledge, values and beliefs. A brief overview of recent cases of urban regeneration in the cities of the South unveils two predominant narratives.

**The orderly city.** The first narrative relates to a vision of the good city as an orderly city. Despite constant critiques of their links to the modernist roots of planning (Sandercock, 1998), such notions of order have remained pervasive, drawing a link between orderly environments, “proper” individual subjects and “proper” communities (Huxley, 2006). They inform some housing interventions, for example in South Africa where attempts were made to replace informal settlements by fully serviced houses (Watson, 2008). They moreover often inform urban regeneration processes and the related policies and strategies, in their attempts to reinvent orderly spaces/places. For example, many Istanbul districts have been earmarked for regeneration on the ground of their “social and physical blight” and on the ground of the sense of disorder stemming from the existence of informal housing units and from the presence of mostly transient and vulnerable inhabitants (Kuyucu, Unsal, 2010:1490). In the same way, Miraftab analyses the regeneration of downtown Cape Town as aiming at “socially sanitis[ing] urban public

space”, focusing on how “informal traders, parking attendants, street kids and the homeless” are apprehended as sources of disorder and are therefore to be disciplined (2007:603).

**The productive city.** The second place-making narrative on which planning actors often focus in urban regeneration relates to the productive city. Urban regeneration has been widely discussed as a tool to re-imagine competitive places on a global scale and as symptomatic of a generalised neoliberal turn in planning (Madanipour, 2001; Winkler 2010; Güzey 2009; Kuyucu, Unsal, 2010). In this respect, urban decline is defined as a “threat to the competitive market agenda of economically liberal governments” (Winkler, 2010:365) and urban regeneration is taken both as a way to mitigate this threat and to promote economic growth. Leisure-oriented initiatives, office space provision, physical upgrading, intensive urban management, commercial space provision, all participate in attracting private investors, visitors and better-off urban dwellers and in enhancing place-based productivity. However, such accounts of neoliberal orientations in urban regeneration tend to display a simplified image of the productive city narrative. They tend to overlook both the potential reinterpretation of neoliberalism in local contexts (Ong, 2007), and the incorporation of pro-poor, local economic development initiatives, initiatives that still seek to foster a productive city while reconciling economic growth and poverty reduction (Robinson, 2008). The productive city narrative therefore needs to be thought of as going beyond a mere focus on the “[design] of space according to global market rules” (Güzey, 2009:28).

**Difference in place-making: an alternative perspective on urban regeneration.** The orderly city and the productive city narratives are closely intertwined and together, implicitly or explicitly and to varying degrees, underpin urban regeneration processes. A focus on these narratives unveils the discursive production of difference in specific urban regeneration configurations. Indeed, focusing on specific notions of order and productivity often leads to the constitution of vulnerable urban dwellers’ politics of becoming as reversely unruly and unproductive, overlooking the everyday meanings of order and productivity – often fluid, translocal and invisible – that underpin it. In other words, it often leads to its constitution as different, whereby difference often bears an exclusionary meaning – although more or less exclusionary – and is framed as more or less deep, depending on the centrality and strength of such narratives. Beyond, as highlighted in chapter 2, the discursive production of difference leads to specific ways of treating vulnerable urban dwellers’ place-making practices in planning praxis. A strong focus on narratives of order and productivity in specific urban regeneration configurations does not only constitute the politics of becoming as deeply different in

an exclusionary manner, but it also contributes to framing the way in which this politics of becoming is to be addressed in practice, often through oppressive/dominant strategies. In other terms, the exclusionary production of difference can lead to detrimental effects for vulnerable urban dwellers and can jeopardise the possibility to respond positively to their needs.

Moreover, this can occur in the context of existing pro-poor commitments. Indeed, neither narratives of order nor narratives of productivity are necessarily anti-poor. Some regeneration interventions displaying intricate narratives of order and productivity can be thought of as clearly pro-poor, such as the construction of a street trading area – for example, the Rocky Raleigh street market in downtown Johannesburg. However, the case of the Rocky Raleigh street market shows that, despite a clear pro-poor commitment from the COJ, the constitution of street traders’ place-making practices as unruly and unproductive and the City’s will to provide them with an infrastructure enhancing their sense of order and their productivity have led to a failure to reach and accommodate them effectively (Simone, Gotz, 2001a.). It has ultimately led to their domination/oppression through the involuntary reinforcement of constraints on their activities.

countries. The EOU and SEZ schemes reproduce these three criteria to differing degrees.

### 3.3. A new planning imagination for urban regeneration

However, the discursive interface between place-making practices does not only bear the possibility of domination/oppression. As discussed above, difference, produced at this interface, can take on a positive meaning allowing for the creative engagement with the latter in practice. There is therefore room for rethinking urban regeneration through the concept of difference.

Many authors who explore vulnerable urban dwellers’ politics of becoming in the cities of the South are ultimately interested in rethinking planning praxis through a valuing of and an engagement with the latter. For example, Harrison defends a “post colonial planning project”, which encompasses “asserting the existence and importance of multiple rationalities and modernities, searching for the in-between spaces, the interstices, where different conceptions of the city, and of planning and rationality, have intermingled and have produced hybrid logics and practices” (2006:320). In the same way, Miraftab defends a form of insurgent planning that “aims at decolonising the planning imagination by taking a fresh look at subaltern cities to understand them by their own rules of the game and values” (2009:45). Eventually, Simone intends to examine vulnerable urban dwellers’ politics of becoming “in order to use these understandings as a platform for more innovative and incisive institutional engagements with urban processes and residents” (2004a:2). These authors

therefore point at defending a new planning imagination that builds on vulnerable urban dwellers' place-making practices.

If one considers that difference is discursively produced and that this process impacts on how vulnerable urban dwellers' politics of becoming is addressed in practice, this new planning imagination would require planning actors' to be attentive to how they produce difference in specific urban regeneration configurations as well as to the effects of this process. It would further imply a commitment to produce difference in positive, non exclusion-

ary ways, recognising that vulnerable urban dwellers' politics of becoming partially works for them. Ultimately, this new planning imagination would imply engaging creatively with and incorporating some aspects of the different politics of becoming enacted by vulnerable urban dwellers in order to respond to their needs, moving towards hybrid urban regeneration interventions. While acknowledging that there is a need for some form of order and some form of productivity, this new planning imagination therefore seeks to redefine and rearticulate those notions, building on their meanings for vulnerable urban dwellers.

### *NOTES TO CHAPTER 3*

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1. Title of an article by Sandercock (2004). I will not use quotation marks in the remainder of this paper, while still referring to her article.

2. In the remainder of this paper, I will not use quotation marks anymore. However, the notion of politics of becoming will still relate to Simone's perspective on everyday spatiality in the cities of the South.

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## 4. Exploring space/place in the inner city of Johannesburg: a focus on housing and the bad buildings

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Exploring residential regeneration in Johannesburg through the lens of the concept of difference as defined above first requires an understanding of the inner city, its housing situation and more precisely the so-called bad buildings, with a focus on their intersections with the politics of becoming. This chapter provides these elements of context, building on secondary sources including academic articles and policy documents, existing surveys and ethnographic materials, movies and documentaries, literature, as well as on materials from my previous research in South Africa (2010).

### 4.1. Contextualising bad buildings

**The inner city: shaped by multiple transformations.** The area conventionally referred to as the inner city belongs to the current administrative region F of Johannesburg (figure 4.1, fig 4.2). It incorporates diverse sub-areas, such as the Central Business and Braamfontein Districts, residential areas and suburbs (e.g. Berea, Hillbrow, Yeoville) and an “arc of light-industry to the South and South-West” (COJ, 2003:192).

The inner city is furthermore historically characterised by ongoing socio-cultural and spatial transformations. As the historic core of Johannesburg, it has been described as having “emerged as an instant city of strangers, aliens and foreigners [...] – a city with no former history” (Nuttall, Mbembe, 2008:17). From the 19th century to the 1970s, its spatiality was determined by the evolutions of the system of racial segregation implemented by the Apartheid state. The latter was successfully implemented with the Group Areas Act of 1950 which had the inner city “zoned for white residential and commercial activity” (COHRE, 2005:15-16). However, from the mid 1970s, this segregationist system started to collapse gradually and the inner city underwent a progressive “shift in [its] racial composition” (Morris, 1994:823) often referred to as the “greying” of the area: Indians and Coloured, and later on Black residents, started to move to the inner city where landlords proved increasingly willing to let them rent. This was due to a massive housing shortage in townships and Bantustans coinciding with a “substantial increase in the vacancy rate in many [inner city] apartment blocks” (Morris, 1999:513), as well as to the progressive erosion of the Apartheid state (ibid). Despite violent attempts to repress desegregation, the latter accelerated, to the point that in “April 1993, 62% of Hillbrow’s population was African,

16.9% was Coloured, 5.4% was Indian and 15.8% was White” (ibid:514). The post Apartheid era witnessed another phase of socio-spatial restructuring of the inner city, corresponding to the influx of both internal migrants and transnational migrants from Sub-Saharan Africa (Landau, 2005:3). Within Johannesburg, the inner city has become attractive to migrant populations: surveys roughly estimate that “close to a quarter of inner city residents [are] born outside South Africa” (Leggett, in ibid:4), although “more recent work suggests that the proportion of foreign born may be much higher in certain neighbourhoods” (Greenburg, Polzer, 2008:2).

The inner city therefore carries a history of successive socio-spatial transformations, from its early days as a mining town characterised by a “gold rush mentality” (Vigneswaran, 2007:10), towards the post Apartheid era characterised by new forms of mobility, via the Apartheid days and attempts at reinventing the place as a White area: “central Johannesburg has in many ways been built under a shroud of constant change” (ibid:9-10).

**The emergence of bad buildings.** This history of successive transformations furthermore translates into a specific housing situation. Indeed, with the influx of formerly segregated groups to the inner city, some landlords started hiking rents, taking advantage of the fact that new tenants were willing to pay more due to the lack of alternatives (Silvermann, Zack, date unknown:17; Zack et al., 2009:6; Morris, 1999:517). Rent increases represented an incentive to overcrowding, both on the tenants’ side as a strategy to lower accommodation costs, and on the landlords’ side as a strategy to obtain increased revenues through early forms of slumlordism (Zack et al., 2009:7). They led to deteriorating landlords/tenants relations and to rent boycotts in the deeply politicised “context of the broader anti Apartheid struggle” (Morris, 1999:510-511). They also led to the decline of buildings’ maintenance. Indeed, overcrowding and increasing pressures on the infrastructures increased the costs of maintenance, which some landlords were not willing to cover. In the same way, rent boycotts and tensions between landlords and tenants also paved the way for the progressive disengagement of landlords from maintenance obligations.

This kicked the start for the physical decline of many buildings, which furthermore accelerated in the post Apartheid era for multiple and intricate reasons (Zack et al., 2009:7). The new government’s commitment to provide housing for low-income households proved largely insufficient, and, in

the case of the inner city undergoing important transformations, the scope of the “unmet [housing] demand” increased significantly (COHRE, 2005:66). This backlog of affordable and well-located accommodation contributed to increasing overcrowding rates and to landlords’ increasing disengagement. It also paved the way for corrupt practices such as slumlordism and building hijacking, whereby individuals take advantage of vulnerable populations’ urgent housing needs. Combined with the “redlining [of the neighbourhoods] by financial institutions” (Zack et al., 2009:8), the overall lack of urban management (until the 2000s), residents’ lack of financial capacity, and some fractions of the latter’s impossibility to access to housing formally or to settle in other areas, this housing backlog fostered the decline of inner city housing into so-called bad buildings.

**Defining bad buildings.** Bad buildings can be defined as high or medium rise buildings that are in mostly poor conditions and inhabited by vulnerable fractions of urban dwellers. They share the fact that their owners generally “owe large amounts in services and rate payments” (COHRE, 2005:45), their reliance on “compromised ownership and

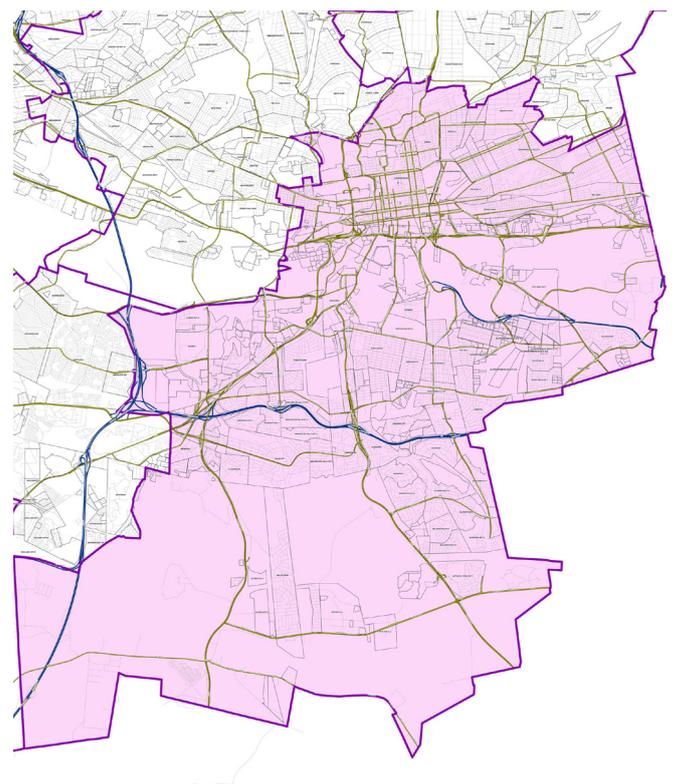
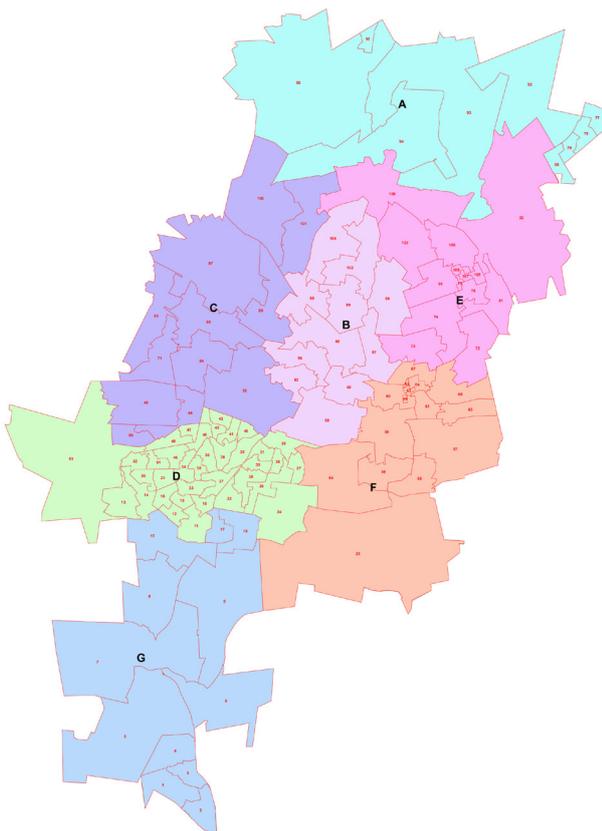
management arrangements” (Zack et al., 2009:10) and their non-compliance with municipal by-laws. However, all bad buildings are not the same. Some are previously vacant buildings that have been invaded by vulnerable urban dwellers or building hijackers. Others are non vacant buildings that are managed by slumlords or that have also been hijacked. Others, on the other hand, have been abandoned by their initial landlords. Yet others are sectional title buildings or buildings managed by small-scale landlords who do not possess the capacities to maintain them. Ultimately, many of them have gone through several of these situations. Furthermore, in some cases tenants are paying rents, while in others they do not. Eventually, both the socio-economic conditions and profiles of their inhabitants and their state of (dis)repair might vary (COHRE, 2005).

## 4.2. Bad buildings and the politics of becoming

**Bad buildings as spaces/places of opportunities.** Bad buildings are immensely diverse and immense-

Figure 4.1 (left) Map of the seven new regions of Johannesburg after the 2006 administrative reform. Source: COJ, 2006.

Figure 4.2 (right) Map of region F. Source: COJ, 2006.



ly complex. However, they all accommodate vulnerable urban dwellers in the context of an important shortage of well-located, affordable accommodation. Those include “fully urbanised households” native from Johannesburg (COHRE, 2005:55), as well as various categories of migrants, including internal migrants as well as transnational migrants and asylum seekers or refugees. Furthermore, they all have been “chosen for [their] ability to assist [their residents] to sustain a livelihood strategy” (ibid:34). Indeed, living in the inner city is crucial for vulnerable urban dwellers since this area provides highly localised, albeit often informal, socio-economic opportunities: surveys conclude that economic vulnerability is reduced in the inner city, as compared to informal settlements and townships (Misago et al., 2010). In this respect, so-called bad buildings unveil the nexus between vulnerable urban dwellers’ navigation of socio-economic opportunities and access to housing. They intersect with their politics of becoming – with their ways of making space/place in fluid, unstable and sometimes invisible ways.

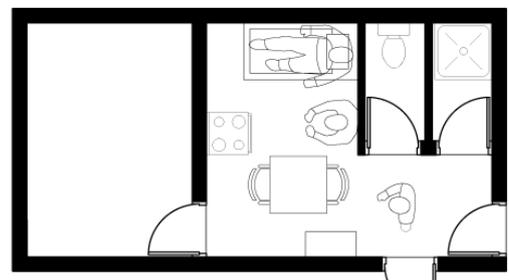
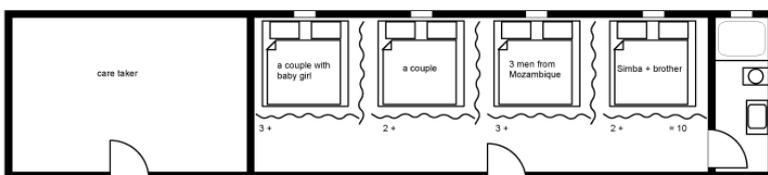
cific forms of circulation. An overview of various surveys exploring residential patterns in the inner city shows that most residents – among whom many were residents of bad buildings – have only recently settled there (Misago et al., 2010:20). The inner city of Johannesburg functions as a “port of first entry’ where [newcomers] from within and outside South Africa first settle” (ibid; Winkler, 2006; Kihato, 2007; Mpe, 2001): it represents the main gateway to Johannesburg for transnational migrants, as well as one out of several gateways for internal migrants. Many residents of bad buildings can therefore be assumed to have arrived in the area and, possibly, in the city, recently. Furthermore, once in the inner city, their housing trajectory remains highly mobile. The shifting nature of socio-economic opportunities leads to important levels of volatility (Greenburg, Polzer, 2008; Few et al., 2004; Simone, 2006:361): residents of bad buildings frequently change or wish to change their residence, both within the inner city and the broader city. In this respect, many residents experience a “common housing story of constant displacement and movement from one temporary, precarious housing situation to the next” (Greenburg, Polzer, 2008:11). For example, “survey data reports that the average for all [transnational migrant] respondents for num-

**Bad buildings as sites of circulation.** As highlighted in chapter 3, the politics of becoming encompasses spe-

**Figure 4.3.** A story of “constant displacement”: S. S.’s housing trajectory in Yeoville, including his experience of bad buildings on Becker Street and Bezuidenhout Street. Source: adapted from Benit-Gbaffou, Doerman, Matsipa, 2010.

*“I came to South Africa from Zimbabwe when I was 20. I had to leave because of political and economic hardship. [...] When I arrived in Yeoville, I needed to find my brother. I didn’t have a contact number for him. So I looked for him as long as I could, then I found a place on the street to sleep. In the morning, [...] someone told me they sometimes saw him by the soccer field. So I went there and waited, and eventually I saw someone who knew where he was [...]. So I went to live with him. I didn’t pay any rent there. [...] We stayed on the roof in the old servants’ quarter. It was always crowded [...] I shared a bed with my brother. [...] I moved a lot of times in Yeoville, maybe six or seven in ten years. The worst place I stayed was on Bezuidenhout street. There were 18 people in the whole space. It was like a passage that was partitioned into 4 rooms. Then people put curtains up. [...] Now am staying in the backstage room at the church [on Regent Street] with a friend.” (ibid., 6)*

**On the left:** Plan of rooftop accomodation on Becker street. This was my first accommodation in Yeoville. It was on a rooftop. I stayed with my brother for free but the place was shared with 9 other people. The room was divided by curtains. **On the right:** Plan of cottage on Regent street. I now live in the backstage dressing rooms for the stage at St Aidan’s church. I pay no rent, and no rates. I have not water all the time. Two other adults share the cottage. They have to go through our room to go to theirs. I share my bedroom with a friend who works with me. The four of us share the bathroom and kitchen.



ber of residential moves since coming to Johannesburg was 7.5 times" (ibid; figure 4.3).

In addition, residents of bad buildings might envision moving to other cities within the country, to other countries – transnational migrants especially tend to see South Africa as a step within broader chains of migration (Burzynski, 2010) – or back to their country or region of origin. This is for example the case of D., a Congolese street trader whom I met in Pretoria, South Africa, who had first settled in the inner city of Johannesburg upon his arrival in the country. He was accommodated by a "Congolese brother" who was sharing a flat in a bad building in Berea. After a few months spent there, D. decided to move from Johannesburg to Pretoria.

Yet others commute between spaces/places. This has been observed in the case of transnational migrants (Kihato, 2007) and internal migrants: indeed, in South Africa, "strong urban–rural ties [...] still exist, and [...] keep many people in perpetual motion between urban and rural bases" (Watson, 2002:40). But this mobility can also be imaginary, through money remittances, exchanges of mails or phone calls, activities that stretch across locations – through what one can call "virtual journeys" (Bayart, Adelhah, 2007:8).

Overall, residents of bad buildings are physically and metaphorically on the move. Because socio-economic and housing opportunities are ever shifting, because their relations often stretch across locations, they are pushed to move or envision moving to other spaces/places. In this respect, bad buildings represent sites "to pass through [and] to run from" (Simone, Gotz, 2003a:134) – sites of circulation, real or imagined.

### **Bad buildings and reterritorialisation processes.**

Bad buildings also unveil reterritorialisation processes (De Boeck, 2011) or pirate practices through which "single items, objects [and spaces, *I am adding*] [...] are converted into many, otherwise unanticipated uses" (Simone, 2006:359). The latter emanate both from housing providers (including slumlords and building hijackers) and residents. Indeed, "ironically, there is a natural consonance of interest between the slumlords and the very poor" (Zack et al., 2009:9). Reterritorialisation processes encompass the invasion of vacant residential or non residential buildings, the latter including "bakeries, garages, warehouses, office blocks and factories" (Few et al., 2004:430; Greenburg, Polzer, 2008:11). This invasion (and potential conversion) can be undertaken either by urban dwellers themselves or by building hijackers.

Reterritorialisation processes furthermore encompass internal subdivisions (Few et al., 2004; Greenburg, Polzer, 2008; COHRE, 2005; Vearey et al., 2010:699) for affordability, availability and flexibility purposes. In this respect, one study concluded that 43% of households in the inner city live in subdivided flats (Vearey et al., 2010:699). These subdivisions can go as far as paving the way for actual informal settlements within buildings (Few et al.,

2004). Bad buildings can also display a "proliferation of illegally erected shacks" in their immediate surroundings and behind them. To this ever evolving spatiality corresponds an ever evolving social composition and increasingly complex tenure arrangements, with the development of various layers of renters and sub-renters.

Eventually, reterritorialisation processes include the shifting uses of space/place, between residential and commercial uses. Indeed, many bad buildings also serve as a base for economic activities and small businesses<sup>1</sup>. All such practices allow vulnerable fractions of urban dwellers to negotiate access to housing in the inner city and to reach localised opportunities while contributing to the complexity, fluidity and malleability of space/place. Bad buildings are constantly in the (re)making, as their internal spatial organisation and their relations to their surroundings shift. They manifest the piracy component of the politics of becoming.

**Bad buildings as illegible spaces/places.** Ultimately, reterritorialisation and circulation processes at play in and around bad buildings lead to forms of invisibility and illegibility. Illegibility occurs at three levels. It first relates to residents themselves. As highlighted above, bad buildings are characterised by high rates of residents' volatility and complex tenure arrangements. This makes it difficult to know who actually inhabits bad buildings, for how long, where they come from and what they do in the inner city. This is furthermore reinforced by the fact that some residents of bad buildings, such as potentially illegal transnational migrants, need to be invisible to remain in the city, as noted in chapter 3.

The second form of invisibility/illegibility relates to housing "providers". Multiple layers of claims of ownership and legitimacy in building management complicate the legibility of bad buildings. Often, there are few clues regarding who actually owns the buildings, who receives the rents, who maintains (or not) the buildings etc. In the case of abandoned buildings, this relates to the difficulty to trace back to the landlords themselves. In the case of criminal housing providers, this relates to the fact that the very activity of providing housing through corrupt practices needs to be invisible to function.

The last form of invisibility relates to the activities performed in and around bad buildings. As shown above, bad buildings can represent a base for economic activities which often do not comply with existing regulations. As a consequence, economic activities participating in the (re)making of bad buildings equally have to remain hidden.

Bad buildings thus are sites that are difficult to read. They are inhabited by often invisible populations, performing sometimes invisible activities, while being managed in invisible ways. If it can be detrimental to vulnerable residents, this illegibility also partially functions for them, allowing them to access housing and economic opportunities in the inner city.

Overall, bad buildings have come to embody the apparent messiness and dysfunctionality of the inner city as a whole. Their apparent state of disrepair and overcrowding, the lack of access to services, their link to corrupt and criminal housing provision practices, their occupation by marginalised and often stigmatised populations, have led many observers to consider them as highly undesirable places to live. And they are harsh places to inhabit. However, while it is important not to romanticise

vulnerable people's place-making practices and while it is crucial to tackle criminal practices, it is equally important to acknowledge that in "these [apparent] ruins, something else besides decay might be happening" (Simone, 2004b:407). Bad buildings also represent sites from which the politics of becoming is enacted and, beyond, they are themselves (re)made through such a politics of becoming. But how have planning actors been relating to this politics of becoming?

#### *NOTES TO CHAPTER 4*

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1. Some authors consider that some bad buildings are also used for criminal activities. However, there is no consensus about whether these activities emanate from vulnerable resi-

dents (COHRE, 2005; Zack et al., 2009). I will therefore let it aside, since I do not have the possibility to explore it in sufficient depth.

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## 5. An analysis of the production and treatment of difference in two urban regeneration policy frameworks

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This chapter explores two urban regeneration policy frameworks, as two contingent planning configurations that partly aim at tackling bad buildings. In doing so, particular emphasis will be put on how the ways in which the politics of becoming has been produced as different and its subsequent treatment in practice have hindered the possibility to meet vulnerable residents' housing needs. I will first provide some elements of context, justifying the impetus to move beyond an approach to residential regeneration as deliberately and uniformly anti-poor. I will then outline the perspective and the methodology chosen in this paper. The remainder of the paper will be concerned with the analysis of the Inner City Regeneration Strategy (2003) and the Inner City Regeneration Charter (2007) through the lens of the concept of difference.

### 5.1. Reframing the approach to residential regeneration in Johannesburg

**An overall pro-poor agenda.** In order to explore an alternative approach as to why residential regeneration has proved apparently insensitive to or unable to meet the housing needs of bad buildings' residents, one must first provide an overview of the planning context in which attempts to deal with bad buildings are located. Such attempts are linked to two planning agendas. On the one hand, planning in South Africa is deeply embedded in the "developmental local government [...] defined as a 'local government committed to working with citizens and groups within the community to find sustainable ways to meet their social, economic and material needs and improve the quality of their lives'" (Rogerson, 2004:403; see also Parnell, Pieterse, 2010; Beall et al., 2000). In this respect, the local state in South Africa displays an explicit commitment to poverty reduction, enshrined in several pieces of legislation including the South African Constitution and the White Paper on Local Government (1998) and translated into specific planning tools (see the Integrated Development Plans). This commitment responds to the impetus to address the legacy of the Apartheid as well as rampant inequalities at play in South African cities (Beall et al., 2000). Housing provision for the poor is furthermore part of such an explicit commitment. Indeed, Section 26 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa states that "(1) everyone has the right to have access to adequate housing; (2) the state must take reasonable legislative and other measures, within its available

resources, to achieve the progressive realisation of this right" (in COHRE, 2005:26). This acknowledgement of the right to housing, as part of a broader commitment to redistribution, led to important achievements in terms of housing delivery for the poor, although those were not sufficient to absorb what remains a massive housing backlog in the country. As a whole, planning, as part of the local state's developmental mandate in South Africa, generally displays a progressive and pro-poor commitment, and housing for the poor is central to this commitment. Attempts to deal with bad buildings, as a type of housing accommodating vulnerable fractions of urban dwellers, therefore occur in an overarching pro-poor context.

**The urban regeneration impetus.** Attempts to deal with bad buildings are furthermore located within the context of ongoing urban regeneration efforts concerned with the re-imagining of spaces/places, which have not been uniformly and deliberately anti-poor. First regeneration efforts started during the late Apartheid years, with the "gateway to Africa" vision (Bremner, 2000:187). This early regeneration commitment "was based on models of urban entrepreneurialism [...] and urban regeneration [...] drawn from North America and Western Europe, centred on physical regeneration and investment in buildings and infrastructure" (ibid). While using the rhetoric of an "integrated city", it was mainly concerned with reinventing the city as a European-like, competitive place, ignoring the specificity of the area as well as its local population's needs. In the post Apartheid era, the "golden heartbeat of Africa" vision was designed, involving the public and private sectors as well as civil society (COJ, 2007:3). This new vision, while still seeking to reinvent the inner city, attempted at responding more directly to local conditions: it displayed a new focus on "local upliftment" (Bremner, 2000:189) in line with the new developmental mandates of the local state, although notions of place competitiveness and place attractiveness remained central. This vision was supported by an "inner city economic development strategy" (1999), an "inner city spatial framework" (1999) and a "city centre development framework" (2000), and by the establishment of the Inner City Office (1998 – see COJ, 2007:3). It is however only in the 2000s that inner city regeneration became one of the core priorities for the COJ (Rogerson, 2004; COJ, 2007; COJ, 2004). Existing initiatives were scaled up through the launch of an Inner City Regeneration Strategy (ICRS) and an Inner

City Regeneration Strategy business plan respectively in 2003 and 2004. These called for ongoing, sustained and multi-sectoral regeneration efforts, supported by new institutional arrangements including the Johannesburg Development Agency (see COJ, 2003:194). They were however replaced in 2007 by an Inner City Regeneration Charter (ICC), following “eight months of intensive dialogue with a wide range of Inner City stakeholders” including civil society organisations (COJ, 2007:1). The latter reconducted the city’s commitment to multi-faceted regeneration while reframing the regeneration vision and its sub-strategies.

Both these frameworks (2003, 2007) aim at reinventing the inner city while combining high-profile strategies and some degree of pro-poor concerns. The ICRS indeed aims at “rais[ing] and sustain[ing] private investment leading to steady rise in property values” (COJ, 2004:11), putting the stress on private sector involvement and economic growth. It further focuses on “ripple pond investments” and other flagship projects ensuring a business-friendly, tourist-friendly environment. However, it does feature pro-poor local economic development initiatives (regarding taxi and informal trading areas) and emerging pro-poor housing commitments (with the envisioned provision of social housing units through the Better Buildings Programme). As for the ICC, it explicitly aims at fostering regeneration “without having a detrimental effect on Inner City communities” (COJ, 2007:4). It envisions that the inner city “remains the vibrant business heart of Johannesburg as a whole” and encourages private sector involvement, while seeking to reinvent it as a space/place that works for residents from different social backgrounds, including the poor. It therefore seeks to balance place competitiveness with more explicit pro-poor concerns.

**An alternative perspective on residential regeneration.** The planning project to address bad buildings is therefore located both within a broader pro-poor commitment and within broader urban regeneration efforts, recently attempting at combining pro-poor elements and high profile projects. However, bad buildings have been said to have been tackled in ways that appeared insensitive to their vulnerable residents’ conditions or that failed to meet their needs (Winkler, 2011:364; Harrison, 2006:330; Simone, 2004b:418). In a generally pro-poor context, and while recognising (to varying extents) the importance of meeting the needs of vulnerable urban dwellers through regeneration, how can one explain such an apparent failure and insensitivity?

As highlighted in chapter 3, specific urban regeneration configurations unveil a focus on narratives of order and productivity. While these narratives are not necessarily anti-poor, they often contribute to discursively produce vulnerable urban dwellers’ politics of becoming as different in a potentially exclusionary fashion, leading to related ways of framing planning interventions. In this respect, one can consider successive urban regeneration frame-

works in Johannesburg as specific planning configurations where bad buildings residents’ politics of becoming encounters planning actors’ ways of making space/place, is discursively produced as different and subsequently addressed as such. This perspective on residential regeneration calls for a form of discursive analysis. Post-structuralist and social constructivist approaches argue that “a ‘discursive’ approach to social policy analysis can help to uncover how the use of language is connected to broader processes and practices”, uncovering the “societal implications” of language (Hastings, 1998:192). They consider that planning issues are socially constructed, and that this construction is mediated through discourses (written or spoken), with a focus on institutional discourses. They further consider that such discourses are argumentative: they promote “particular versions of reality” while their success depends on whether such versions of reality are widely “shared or accepted” (ibid:194). In this respect, discourse analysis is an effective analytical tool in order to unveil how planning issues are discursively constructed, what “versions of reality” are put forward, and what the “social effects” (Hastings, 2000:132) of specific discursive practices are. It entails an attention to the “detailed aspects of language” (Hastings, 1998:196) and an attention to policy narratives as shown in Hastings’ analysis of the “New Life for Urban Scotland” regeneration framework (ibid).

In the context of this paper, discursive analysis is thought to unveil the production of difference and, ultimately, the subsequent framing of strategies addressing place-making practices that are constituted as different. The ICRS and the ICC will be successively explored as specific regeneration configurations, focusing on their underlying narratives and on the related production and treatment of difference. However, due to the impossibility to undertake fieldwork, this paper does not build on other forms of planning discourses potentially participating in the production of difference (for example, discussions during planning fora). This represents a methodological limitation, as “the emphasis on textual analysis has, arguably, led to a restricted view of the nature of the policy process. In some analyses, policy appears to take on a rather static, top down character, losing its dynamic, conflictual and processual nature” (Hastings, 2000:133).

## **5.2. From the deeply exclusionary production of difference to the politics of displacement: the case of the ICRS (2003)**

**The production of difference in the ICRS.** The ICRS and the related business plan explicitly focus on several key goals. They aim, among others, at:

*“addressing city blight, the degradation of buildings and physical deterioration of service infrastructure; decreasing high levels*

*of crime and lack of security; reversing the flight of office workers and associated users to suburban nodes; addressing the physical degradation of public areas caused by litter and decay; upgrading the area to stop the decline in rentals and property values; decreasing illegal occupation and land invasion in residential suburbs and vacated buildings [...]*" ([http://www.joburg.org.za/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=178&catid=51&Itemid=121&limitstart=1](http://www.joburg.org.za/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=178&catid=51&Itemid=121&limitstart=1))

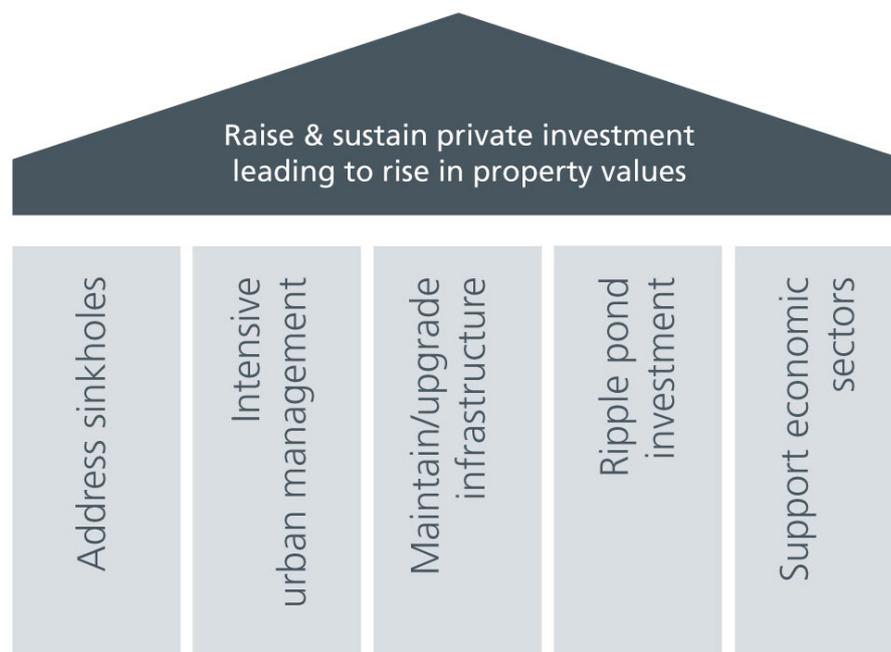
Those key goals unveil underlying narratives of order and productivity. Order is thought to be both social and physical, while productivity encompasses the revenue extracted from real estate as well as an increased economic dynamism (including that of small and medium enterprises). Reinventing the inner city along those lines furthermore relies on the identification of five "pillars" (figure 5.1): intensive urban management; infrastructure maintenance and upgrading; economic sectors support; the tackling of 'sinkholes'; the promotion of ripple-pond investments.

Bad buildings crystallise these overarching narratives of order and productivity. In this respect, it is particularly significant that they are tackled through the "urban management" and the "sinkhole" pillars. Bad buildings, and their residents' politics of becoming, are indeed described as characterised by physical and social blight. A review of both the ICRS and its business plan reveals a discourse that focuses on physical decay: bad buildings are in-

deed described as "run down" (COJ, 2003:193) and as "shoddy urban environment[s]" (COJ, 2004:6) characterised by "slummification" (COJ, 2003:193), and defined as sinkholes i.e. "properties, or whole precincts of properties, that are abandoned, overcrowded or poorly maintained" (ibid:195). But urban blight also encompasses "social problems" (ibid:192) assumed to be predominant in bad buildings, including high levels of criminality and illegality. This is through to be visible through by-laws and building code infringements, the presence of "unlawful occupants" (COJ, ibid:197), and the use of buildings for "illegal or unsuitable purposes (shebeens<sup>1</sup> and clubs in incorrect places, prostitution, drugs, sweatshops, panel beaters in residential areas etc)" (COJ, 2004:11). Moreover, bad buildings are believed to accommodate "illegal immigrants who have no legitimate business in the city or indeed in the country" (COHRE, 2005:45). In this respect, circulation practices, invisible practices and reterritorialisation processes in and around bad buildings, despite their partial functionality, are seen as physically and socially disorderly.

Ultimately, the ICRS and the related business plan further associates this sense of disorder with unproductiveness. Bad buildings are said to "have the effect of pulling down surrounding areas in an accelerated self-reinforcing cycle of decay by creating disincentives to private investment and blocking sales" (COJ, 2003:195). Bad buildings are in arrears with services and rate payments and the associated politics of becoming contribute to have portions of the city's revenue uncollected, but and ultimately they have a broader negative imprint on the productivity of the area.

**Figure 5.1.** The five pillars underpinning the ICRS. Source: COJ, 2003.



In this respect, the ICRS, as a specific planning configuration, unveils a discursive interface between planning actors' place-making practices and vulnerable residents' politics of becoming. Its strong focus on narratives of order and productivity contributes to constituting the latter as deeply unproductive and deeply unruly. In other words, through this strong emphasis on such narratives, the multiple, fluid ways of making space/place enacted in and around bad buildings are implicitly defined as deeply different, whereby difference bears a strong exclusionary meaning. The ways in which bad buildings partially function in the context of such place-making practices are therefore not recognised in the ICRS.

**The politics of displacement as a form of oppression/domination.** The exclusionary way in which difference has been discursively produced in the ICRS has entailed oppressive and dominant strategies dealing with bad building and their politics of becoming. The ICRS outlines targeted interventions in order to deal with bad buildings and the related politics of becoming, interventions which are described in terms of "building closures [and] clean-ups", "blitz operations" and sinkhole "eradication" (COJ, 2004:13, 14, 15). In practice, this encompassed a series of forced evictions led by the COJ and targeting an estimated number of 67 000 vulnerable residents of the inner city residing in bad buildings (ESCR, date unknown). These evictions were justified on the ground of health, fire and safety hazards, as supported by the "National Building Regulations and Building Standards Act" (n°103, 1977). Using this piece of legislation – somewhat outdated – represented a way to circumvent existing progressive anti-eviction laws, such as the Prevention of Illegal Eviction from and Unlawful Occupation of Land Act (COHRE, 2005:38-39). These evictions were furthermore characterised by some degrees of brutality performed by private security agents (Red Ants), involving the destruction or theft of vulnerable residents' belongings and violence performed on residents themselves as described in the following article extract:

*"On the morning of 20 November, residents of Armadale Place were roughly awakened by the 'red-ants' [...]. Doors were banged shortly before being smashed open and residents were given less than five minutes to get dressed and out of their flats. The residents were completely helpless as they faced gun barrels during this operation. [...] They were either ignored or beaten when they asked for more time as most did not get enough time to get properly or decently dressed or gather their essentials under such short and final notice. The discarded residents were dumped on the pavement and for the five nights before refuge was found at the B.G. Alexander shelter in Hill-*

*brow, they were taunted by the Wozani Security [official name of the Red Ants, I am adding] who carted away what valuables they could carry from the building."* (Anti Privatization Forum, December 12th, 2002)

These evictions did not lead to any organized relocation, leading former bad buildings' residents to sleep in the streets for a few nights until they eventually moved either to an informal settlement outside the inner city or to another bad building (BBC, April 10th 2006; COHRE, 2005). The social housing units to be provided via the "Better Buildings Programme" proved unaffordable and insufficient to accommodate former bad buildings' residents, as well as being disconnected from the eviction processes (ibid:42). In this respect, and following the ICRS, bad buildings and their residents' politics of becoming were tackled through what one can call a politics of displacement (expression adapted from Roy, 2009b). This obviously refers to the physical displacement of evictees being forced to leave their residence and to seek another accommodation either somewhere else in the inner city or in the broader city. This also refers, metaphorically, to the marginalisation of those place-making practices enacted by the residents of bad buildings which were constituted as deeply different. Evicting them, thus, implies displacing their politics of becoming as inadequate in the re-imagined inner city. This politics of displacement clearly had dramatic consequences for vulnerable residents, threatening their capacity to reach localised socio-economic opportunities and their capacity to negotiate access to affordable, well-located accommodation. It ultimately represented a form of oppression and domination, whereby residents were made passive in determining their future actions and conditions of life, and whereby their livelihoods and possibilities to shape their existences were jeopardised. However, more than a deliberate effort to "bleach away the poor" (Anti Privatization Forum, December 12th 2002), these oppressive/dominant outcomes can be related to the exclusionary way in which residents' politics of becoming has been produced as deeply different in the ICRS. In this respect, producing the latter as deeply different, in a deeply exclusionary fashion, has led to the oppressive/dominant framing of planning strategies: the politics of becoming is to be displaced, if not eradicated.

### **5.3. From the reframed production of difference towards (limited) hybridity: the case of the ICC (2007))**

**The production of difference in the ICC.** The ICC proposes a reframing of the inner city regeneration vision and strategies, in relation to explicit critiques of and legal challenges to the politics of displacement outlined above: "in the face of [the] challenges [faced in urban regenera-

tion], City efforts have sometimes been seen as localised, fragmented and episodic, and have been critiqued as not always sensitive enough to the circumstances of poorer residents" (COJ, 2007:4). In this respect, the new vision for the inner city puts the stress on "accommodat[ing] all people and interests", on residential regeneration (an area of focus which was less present in the ICRS) and on the provision of a "high quality urban environment" for all. It seeks to be more balanced and to strengthen pro-poor elements. This reframing furthermore encompasses a relative shift in the narratives of order and productivity at play throughout the overall charter. On the one hand, the inner city is still described as disorderly, justifying various forms of by-law enforcement, a focus on fostering a culture of compliance, the reordering of the inner city "visual cityscape", the tackling of "unmanaged" and "disorganised" street trading (ibid:19, 25) etc. A focus on enhancing place-based productivity is also maintained, encompassing high-profile strategies such as the reinvention of the inner city as the "cultural capital" of the country (ibid:21) and the promotion of "urban development zones" (ibid:29), as well as a strengthened focus on local economic development (ibid:24) whereby productivity meets the aforementioned narrative of order. However, on the other hand, the ICC starts acknowledging the specificity of the inner city as a place of becoming. It indeed defines it as a "fast changing city [centre] that accommodate[s] a wide range of functions and interests in a dynamic mix" (ibid:5), inhabited by a diversity of vulnerable inhabitants, including migrants, refugees and "recently settled and still mobile populations" in search for socio-economic opportunities (ibid:38). In this respect, an emerging recognition that space/place might work for vulnerable residents in specific ways is displayed.

Bad buildings and the related politics of becoming are furthermore redefined in accordance with this overall change of discourse. The ICC still associates them with disorder and unproductiveness, considering that bad buildings are sites where "crime and waste [is] generated [and] spills out onto the street", "often utilised by criminals as bases for operations", as well as a threat to "sustainable rates and service charge revenue for the City" and to "property values and economic investment in the area" (ibid:12). However, this is balanced by the recognition that bad buildings and the related politics of becoming also respond to a "deeper structural [housing] problem" (ibid:43). The ICC acknowledges their role in allowing vulnerable urban dwellers to access housing in the context of an acute housing shortage in the inner city and to negotiate their livelihoods (ibid:46). It recognises that they are particularly crucial to "households new to the city or just starting out on the housing ladder", outlining the "role [of the inner city] as Johannesburg's port of first entry" for such populations (ibid:43).

In this respect, the ICC, as another configuration that highlights the discursive interface between planning actors' and residents' place-making practices, displays a reframed production of difference. Narratives of order and

productivity, although still present, appear as less central and more nuanced than in the ICRS. Residents' politics of becoming therefore remains constituted as different in an exclusionary manner – they remain partly defined as unruly and unproductive in the context of such persisting narratives. But the production of difference appears as less exclusionary, while the extent of such difference is lessened. Indeed, the ICC partially recognises how bad buildings and their residents' politics of becoming allow these populations to negotiate access to well-located, affordable housing and localised socio-economic opportunities – it displays an attempt to define and relate to the politics of becoming positively.

### **The reframing of residential regeneration strategies: an embryonic form of hybridity?**

The strategies devised to address bad buildings and the related politics of becoming have also been reframed, in relation with the aforementioned reframing of the production of difference. This coincides with the fact that, following legal battles between the COJ and residents of bad buildings, evictions without relocation have been rendered more difficult to perform. Although the ICC still envisions the elimination of bad buildings and the related practices of becoming through intensive urban management, both are also to be addressed through housing strategies, in accordance with their redefinition as a housing issue. In this respect, the ICC features an Inner City Housing Plan which attempts at providing housing solutions to residents from various socio-economic backgrounds. Those include pro-poor, affordable housing solutions for vulnerable "residents who are at the point of their lives and careers where they cannot afford very much" (COJ, 2007:44), including bad buildings' residents. Beyond this apparent pro-poor commitment in relation to housing provision, the COJ seems to be starting to incorporate (limited aspects of) vulnerable residents' politics of becoming in its strategies. Its commitment to provide a broader range of housing options represents one step towards building on such place-making practices. The ICC looks at providing:

*"temporary accommodation options serving a range of interests:*

*- Shelters providing for a range of special needs (street children, abused women and trafficked girls, the aged, chronically homeless etc)*

*- Emergency accommodation to cater for disasters*

*- Decent facilities to enable relocation of residents where refurbishment of unsafe buildings is critical, or for temporary accommodation purposes when properties are being upgraded*

*- Transitional housing and affordable rental" (COJ, 2007:46).*

This widened range of housing options is thought to cater for diverse relations to housing and possibly for diverse place-making practices in and around housing. The emphasis on “transitional housing” is particularly interesting in this respect. Indeed, this type of housing is “designed on the assumption that people just entering the housing market need a semi-permanent option (say for two years) of very cheap accommodation, sometimes accompanied by targeted training programmes” (ibid). It can therefore target, among others, newcomers to the city, while being potentially usable as a stepping stone towards other forms of housing and other spaces/places in and beyond the city of Johannesburg. Implicitly, it therefore incorporates and can be interpreted in the context of circulation practices. In this respect, the relative reframing of the production of difference in the ICC allows for an embryonic incorporation of aspects of residents’ politics of becoming in the housing strategies devised. It unveils an emerging form of “hybridisation of housing policy” (Harris, 1998:180). Nevertheless, this hybridisation remains hugely limited. For example, the ICC does not feature any attempt to integrate economic activities within apartment blocks, combining residential regeneration and local economic development through building on the reterritorialisation component of the politics of becoming. In the

same way, most housing options envisioned might not be flexible enough to accommodate an ongoing flow of residents coming and going – unlike bad buildings which are open to residents’ circulations. This furthermore can be related to the fact that some aspects of the politics of becoming remain associated with the disorderly and the unproductive. In addition, ultimately, the vision of the inner city as a “mixed income community” (COJ, 2007:44) necessarily renders vulnerable residents’ politics of becoming marginal. In this perspective, and despite a strong pro-poor commitment, the housing solutions envisioned by the ICC are not likely to respond effectively to the needs of all bad buildings’ residents, which might lead to a renewed, albeit indirect, politics of displacement.

This points to the need to reframe the production of difference, in relation to the politics of becoming, in more radical and positive ways, opening a space for their strengthened valuing and for their deeper incorporation in the design of housing strategies that would work for vulnerable residents. In other words, the analysis of the ICC leads to re-asserting the need for a more radical planning imagination for residential regeneration, as a crucial endeavour in order to respond effectively and meaningfully to the housing needs of bad buildings’ residents.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER 5

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1. Shebeens are informal pubs.

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## 6. Conclusion

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This paper has sought to propose an alternative perspective on urban regeneration processes, beyond a common focus on their neoliberal underpinnings and on a deliberate anti-poor endeavour. It has sought to explore their apparent insensitivity or inability to respond effectively to vulnerable urban dwellers' needs through a focus on place-making practices and their discursive encounters in specific urban regeneration configurations, via the concept of the difference. This paper has argued that this apparent insensitivity or inability to respond to vulnerable urban dwellers' needs can be (partly) read as related to the ways in which the latter's place-making practices are constituted as different in contingent regeneration configurations, and subsequently addressed in praxis. This does not imply that the production and treatment of difference is the only factor at play; however, an approach to urban regeneration which locates itself at the interface between forms of place-making as well as at the nexus between knowledge/values/beliefs, discourse and practice remains highly relevant as well as often overlooked.

The case of residential regeneration in the inner city of Johannesburg, and more precisely the treatment of bad buildings as part of the latter, has allowed exploring this argument in more depth. Indeed, South Africa is characterised by an overall pro-poor planning and governance context, materialised in ongoing attempts to promote the right to adequate housing for vulnerable urban dwellers as well as in a growing commitment to meeting the needs of the latter through urban regeneration. Acknowledging this overall pro-poor context, this paper has sought to analyse the apparent insensitivity to or inability to meet vulnerable urban dwellers' with respect to the production of difference and its treatment in praxis as made visible in the ICRS and the ICC.

The ICRS, through a strong focus on narratives of order and productivity, unveils the constitution of vulnerable residents' politics of becoming as deeply different, whereby difference takes on a strong exclusionary meaning. On the other hand, the ICC displays a more nuanced focus on order and productivity and starts acknowledging that space/place might work in peculiar ways for vulnerable residents of bad buildings.

They have subsequently led to distinct strategies aimed at tackling bad buildings and the related politics of becoming – deeply dominant and oppressive in the case of the ICRS, and partly hybrid in the case of the ICC. However, even in the case of the ICC, the strategies devised remain unlikely to cater for the needs of populations whose access to housing and socio-economic opportunities strongly relies on forms of circulation, reterritorialisation and invisibility.

In other words, the ways in which difference is produced in

these two policy documents – the ways in which the politics of becoming is defined, in more or less exclusionary ways and as more or less deeply different – matter. They contribute to shaping planning strategies devised to deal with bad buildings, as well as, ultimately, their potential effects on vulnerable urban dwellers.

This case study therefore re-asserts the importance of attempting at operationalising a new planning imagination for urban regeneration. As briefly outlined in chapter 3, this imagination is deeply reflective. It entails reflecting upon how, as planning actors, we participate in producing difference and upon the effects of this process. This implies being aware of the knowledge, values and beliefs that we put forward – all participating in the choice of focusing on specific planning narratives and in producing difference in varying ways. This imagination is also political. Indeed, if the production of difference is imbued with specific knowledge, values and beliefs, we, as planning actors, have the scope to reframe it in ways that allow for the valuing of difference – thereby “[expanding] the political horizons of planning” (Sandercock, 2004:134). This encompasses a commitment to reframe and enhance our knowledge of how space/place works for vulnerable urban dwellers, including efforts to produce an in-depth knowledge of vulnerable urban dwellers' place-making practices prior to designing planning interventions. This imagination is also hybrid. It implies being committed to engaging creatively with and building on aspects of place-making practices that are positively produced as different whenever possible, in a deeper and more systematic manner. This is not an easy task: there might indeed be aspects of the politics of becoming that are difficult to translate into viable planning interventions in the context of broader financial, practical and regulatory constraints, or that cannot be translated into planning interventions. However, this should remain an important commitment to explore in praxis.

Overall, this new planning imagination calls for a spatialised approach to poverty reduction. In this respect, the overarching conclusion of this paper is that, in order to meet the housing and other needs of vulnerable urban dwellers, an explicit pro-poor commitment, translating into assumed pro-poor interventions, is not sufficient. In order to be effectively pro-poor, there is a need to move towards a spatialised approach, one that builds on different ways of making space/place, whereby difference takes on a positive and transformative meaning. In other words, there is a need to put everyday spatiality at the centre of planning praxis. This renewed planning imagination for urban regeneration is therefore a deeply spatialised imagination.

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