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The Nazareth Baptist Church (Ibandla lama Nazaretha or Shembe Church) is the oldest African Independent/Indigenous Church in South Africa. It was founded by Inkosi Isaiah Shembe (1860–1935) in 1910. The church forms part of African Initiated Churches that date back to the 4th century Ethiopian Orthodox Church. The church has since split into a number of factions as a result of internal differences, the subject of which is beyond the scope of this research.

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SOCIOLOGY | RESEARCH ARTICLE

The sacred and urban transformation in Durban: Open-air temples of the Nazareth Baptist church

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Abstract: This paper discusses urban spatial transformation in Durban with specific focus on the ubiquitous “open-air” temples in public open spaces, office, and industrial sites. It borrows from a number of insights to try and shed light on this phenomenon. Concepts of “Insurgent planning” and “loose space,” understood as ingraining existing hitherto officially unacknowledged land uses, and/or introducing new identities and practices into the urban fabric; and “loose space” that occur where the designated use seems no longer relevant, or where different land uses are tolerated simultaneously, respectively, were relied upon to generate some insights on the phenomenon. The paper seeks to make a contribution to a growing body of literature on critical urban studies by drawing attention to other ways of conceiving and engaging urban space. Arguing that predominant planning theories are inadequate to account for the diversity of urban experiences, the paper explores alternative theoretical frameworks that speak more eloquently to contemporary issues, more especially in contexts that are increasingly marked by diversity, difference, informality, marginality, and “otherness.” These theoretical frameworks foreground these issues as constitutive of being (in the city), and as contributions to the collective reimagining of the city.

Subjects: Anthropology; Cities & Infrastructure (Urban Studies); Urban Cultures; Urban Politics; Planning; Cultural Studies; Black Studies; Multiculturalism

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

Since predominant planning theories are inadequate to account for the diversity of urban experiences, the paper explores alternative theoretical frameworks that speak more eloquently to contemporary issues, more especially in contexts that are increasingly marked by diversity, difference, informality, marginality, and “otherness.” This paper discusses urban spatial transformation in Durban with specific focus on the ubiquitous “open-air” temples in public open spaces, office, and industrial sites. It seeks to make a contribution to a growing body of literature on critical urban studies by drawing attention to other ways of conceiving and engaging urban space. Concepts of “Insurgent planning” and “loose space,” understood as ingraining existing hitherto officially unacknowledged land uses, and/or introducing new identities and practices into the urban fabric; and “loose space” that occur where the designated use seems no longer relevant, or where different land uses are tolerated simultaneously.

| **Keywords:** diversity; difference; Nazareth Baptist church; loose space; insurgent planning

1. Urban spatial transformation

Cities in South Africa are going through a process of unprecedented social and spatial transformation following the ushering of a more democratic political dispensation more than two decades ago. Urban Planners and other built environment professionals are at the forefront of trying to generate an understanding of the processes that continue to shape current cities in Africa, and to use that understanding to inform planning theory and practice (De Boeck, 2013; Murray, 2004; Mangcu et al., 2003; Simone, 2004 among many others).

The paper investigates and documents an instance of “insurgent planning” in the city of Durban involving the open-air temples of the Shembe Church. “Insurgent planning” is understood as ingrain existing but hitherto officially unacknowledged land uses, and/or introduces new identities and practices into the city’s urban-scape. While this serves to empower ordinary citizens, it could also be argued that this contributes to the official disciplining rational use of space. Such practices or use of urban space are too often ignored in the process of official space-making. Engagement by the local authority in terms of controls that are part of a zoning scheme suggests tacit approval of the sites a proactive approach towards new identities and practices.

The research draws inspiration from a well-trodden path of researchers on “unconventional” uses of space. It is foreshadowed, for example, in the pioneering work of Sandercock’s (1998, 1998a) writings on the challenge of multiculturalism to the (Australian) planning system, and perhaps more recently, Ameel and Tani’s (2012) research on Parkour in Finnish cities, to name a few. The purpose of the paper is to make a contribution to a growing body of literature on critical urban studies by drawing attention to other ways of conceiving and engaging space in the city.

2. Materials and methods

The research relied on both primary and secondary sources of data. Interviews were conducted with key informants. Additional information was also provided by officials from the municipality who have been engaged with leaders of the church over the years. Photographs, and site visits constituted main sources of primary data. Secondary included media reports.

Discourse analysis, semiotics, and phenomenological approaches proved invaluable in making sense of the material. These methods of analysis speak to issues of meaning, the emphasis on experience, and the analysis of language beyond sentences, which at the core of this research. Deconstruction as an approach is inherent in try for meaning and some understanding of this phenomenon.

Concepts such as “mis-use of space” (Mchunu, 2006) and “loose space” (Franck & Stevens, 2007) are deployed as tools for analysis, which both describe the pervasive phenomenon concerning the use of urban spaces contrary to what they were intended or against their zoning designations. Insurgent planning in the sense alluded to above is also part of the analytical tools. Finally, de Certeau’s (1984) ground-breaking work on flaneurism, which through relaxed strolling along the Parisian streets made the tightly controlled rhythms of the city visible was also relied upon as a tool for gathering additional material through observation. De Certeau’s notions of “spatial representation,” which is produced by professionals and city officials, and “representational spaces” as lived and imagined by inhabitants of the city provided another set of analytical techniques for this research. Moreover, “spatial representation” and the notion of “representational spaces” are able to inform that fieldwork. And yet, on this basis, these notions will be able to inform the theoretical discussion at the end of the cycle of the scientific production.

To begin to think of ways and means of addressing this and perhaps similar challenges, it may be necessary to situate the discussion within the broader political, social, and economic forces that are shaping Durban as a city.

3. Reimagining spaces in the city

Faced with the demands for diversity and difference, the urban fabric of Durban is constantly challenged by lived experiences of many urban dwellers. Its ensemble of buildings and spaces are confronted with an amalgam of aspirations, imaginations, and social practices that transcend current paradigms that informed its conception. It seems as though from inception, the socio-economic arrangements and the logistics of “belonging” and becoming are proving to be difficult to read for planners and decision makers. Yet local government still remains as a legitimate locus for decision-making and implementation of an inclusive vision of the city, notwithstanding the perceived halting intervention in shaping the city. This results in what Peattie (1991, p. 36) described as the “splendid entrepreneurial disorder and hustling boosterism”, and “a functioning order that seems messy on the ground” (Peattie 1991, p. 39). The means may not yet be at hand to respond to the challenges of a postmodern present (Mabin, 1994), whose pace and character of developments demand new and innovative methods. Yet cities themselves are not only passive surfaces on which the often spectacular return of the religious is being inscribed (De Boeck, 2013). De Boeck goes on to state that cities impact on religious spaces and structure the experience of the religious, and the sentiments surrounding it.

There is also the issue with past planning practice in South Africa that has also been discussed extensively in South African planning literature (Laburn-Peart, 1991, 1998 to name a few). These authors highlighted among other issues, the discriminatory nature of past apartheid planning and its enduring spatial configuration, the emerging new forms of segregation along class lines, continued marginalisation based on racial, ethnic and other markers of difference.

The challenges of the Shembe spatial practice to planning intervention have to be seen in terms of the broader social processes that are responsible for persisting inequality; what Mbembe (2013) described as the “lust for our lost segregation”; the deep tensions along racial lines; the proliferation of enclaves of affluence and decline; and the ubiquitous informality; all of which characterise the current city-form.

Equally powerful is the ascendancy of a market-driven consumerist culture that revolves around the buying and selling of goods and services, which pervades all aspects of contemporary city life. This has contributed to the pervasive spiritual malaise. The combination of these factors contributes and shapes the current form of the city of Durban. According to De Boeck, 2013, p. 529), the central question, which is worth quoting in full becomes; “How does the sacred—in its various guises and manifestations—resonate with urban realities and with the ways in which urban projects, driven by the (secular) logic of the state or the neoliberal capitalist market, envisage possible futures for the city?”

Ameel and Tani’s (2012, p. 17) discussion of the phenomenon of Parkour in Finnish cities as a “new way of movement that challenges conceptions of acceptable or appropriate behaviour in urban public space” provides another an interesting perspective. They argue that the practice does not “follow the conventional regulations of space and its intended use...they are able to draw their own maps, imposing them on the normal restrictions and codes of behaviour” (Ameel and Tani 2012, p. 19).

In 2005, I documented the need for spaces to practice initiation among the Xhosa speaking peoples in Cape Town, South Africa.¹ There is also the phenomenon of “street memorials” (Mchunu 2005, unpublished paper), which involves the laying of wreaths and crucifixes on sites of fatal road accidents. Franck and Stevens (2007) introduced the concept of “loose space” as a framework for analysing such practices.

4. Informality, marginality, and conflicting use of urban space

The rise in Black Evangelical churches, most of which are accommodated in temporary structures such as community Hall, public open spaces, and former industrial buildings, forms part of this

pervasive use of space in innovative ways. It would appear that Evangelical churches occupy community halls with permission, while Shembe and similar practices that occupy public open spaces do so without requisite permission from the local authorities.

The church was not recognised as a formal legitimate organisation during the apartheid past, while other churches were “given” land. At the time of this research, the municipality had no agreement in place with the church or similar organisations but was in the process of drafting a document to cater for this and similar cases as well. However, a decision was made to “accept and formalise” sites that existed up to 2015. The official view is that those that emerged post 2015 are to be destroyed or the leader is asked to demolish it. In general, the sites “just appear” and “managers need to manage them” according to one council document.

The Shembe practice is representative of instances of marginality and informality that are constitutive of life in African cities. One of the characteristics of contemporary cities, more especially in Africa, is the pervasive informality and marginality as manifested among other examples in street trading, the predominant modes of public transport involving privately operated vehicles, and the infamous squatter settlements or slums, cross-border and rural migrants, (see Alsayyad, 2004). Both marginality and informality thrive on loose spaces of the crumbling urban fabric of the modern city.

Informality and marginality speaks to notions of temporality, ephemerality, uncertainty, and ambiguity. According to one of the officials, the term “open-air temple” come from church members. His view is that it relates to temporal status of the temple, knowing that “they might have to move at some point.” Also inherent in the discussions around informality and marginality are notions of movement and lightness. It is no coincidence that the predominant metaphor of airport cities (aero-polis) is popular in planning and government circles, the emphasis being on speed and lightness. Public transport terminals (airports, bus and taxi ranks, highways, fast-speed rail networks) have become dominant land uses and landmarks. The point being made is that the idea of movement, which has captured official imaginations, resonates with the experience of informality and marginality as other equally important ways of life in the city.

Living on the borderlands as Sandercock (2000) dubs life on the margins or living with informality, is a reality for some of the urban dwellers who have embraced such spaces as positive and full of potential. She suggests that planners could learn from these marginalised groups by listening to their stories in order to improve not only planning theory and practice, but their lives as well.

Witness how the negative connotations associated with marginal spaces like the infamous townships have been gradually subverted, through popular imagination, by a much more positive narrative of townships as hip spaces. This popular view has been reinforced lately by both private and public sector investments in shopping atria and public infrastructure respectively in townships.

These examples echo Lefebvre’s (1991) notion of space as socially produced through and from the human body. They are also anticipated in de Certeau’s (1984) ground-breaking work on flaneurism, which through relaxed strolling along the Parisian streets made the tightly controlled rhythms of the city visible. In a sense flaneurs provided a critique of the strict rules of urban life. The use of space by the Shembe Church needs to be also understood in this context of this increasing phenomenon of informal use of urban space for activities other than what it was intended. The following sections discusses perspectives from the municipality and informants as part of the overall findings.

The sites are usually located in urban areas in and around the Central Business District (CBD), in spaces officially designated for other land uses. It is to be expected that worshippers will meet other people who have different opinions about how best to utilise the space, or those who preferred the original use for which the plot was designated (see Figure 1).

Although these sites are a result of negotiation with the owners for temporal use by the church, this becomes problematic if the land is publicly owned and the municipality has granted permission to occupy without consulting the public. By law, any change in land use requires comment by the public.

The potential conflict that might arise through such appropriation of public spaces by certain groups has been highlighted before. Mchunu (2006) describes a similar phenomenon involving “street monuments” that mark the sites of fatal road accidents. Wreaths and crucifixes are placed on these spots for indefinite periods of time in memory of those who perished.

The sentiment is hard to fault, inasmuch as it is hard to challenge the rather benign uses by the Shembe Church. But there is a sense in which public spaces are usurped by particular groups to the exclusion of others without any due processes being followed.

Franck and Stevens (2007) also popularised a somewhat similar notion with their concepts of “tight and loose” spaces. “Loose spaces” occur where the designated use seems no longer relevant, or where different land uses are tolerated simultaneously. These also tend to be spaces that seem superfluous, or “leftover spaces that are free of official planning and commodification” (Franck and Stevens 2007, p. 8), as exemplified in Figure 2. According to Franck and Stevens (*ibid*), loose spaces are central to the production of a healthy urban texture because they facilitate the expression of diversity on the urban landscape.

These practices activate spaces in unconventional manners, appropriating public open spaces for their activities. In the case of Shembe, they negotiate their right to use these spaces with owners, be they private or local authorities. According to the one informant, such uses are always temporal, subject to the agreement with the owner. They also pointed to the lack of physical structures to indicate the non-permanent nature of the use, and that all denominations are welcome to pray.

Figure 1. A well-maintained site by city council in the suburb of Morningside.

(Source: Author).



Figure 2. One of the open-air temples in the city.



5. Some preliminary findings

In Lefebvre terms (1971 [1968]), the city of Durban may be characterised as a “spatial practice” produced between “spatial representation” of professionals and city officials, and “representational spaces” as lived and imagined by inhabitants of the city. “Spatial representation” refers to those spaces produced by professionals and officials, and “representational spaces” refers to those spaces that result from people’s interaction with the built environment that is produced by professionals.

“Representational spaces” oftentimes are instances of cultural conflict and change, which activates spaces in ways hitherto not imagined, and as such, transforms cities in anticipated ways. The numerous siting of these open-air temples, predominantly on public/municipal land in and around the city represent instances of “insurgent planning,” which results in “representational spaces.”

In the context of South Africa, planning challenges presented by “representational spaces” cannot be understood without reference to both the colonial and apartheid pasts, which, with the aid of modern planning techniques, marginalised groups in society and other ways of being in the city. Overcoming this legacy is the single most defining aspect of current state planning initiatives in South Africa. Opportunities for “spontaneous self-diversification” emanate, in part, from a more inclusive post-apartheid political dispensation that is more tolerant of difference.

5.1. Impact on urban form

In the inner city, there has been a marked proliferation in the number of sites of different shapes and dimensions, which bear the hallmark of the Nazareth Baptist Church (see Figure 2).

The mere sight of the Shembe religious gathering in seemingly awkward shaped and random spaces in and around the city, especially on Saturdays, is enough to arouse curiosity from tourist and locals alike. White stones arranged in a semi-circle preferably under a tree have become a common sight not only in Durban, but can be seen in other cities as well.

According to the informants, the “founding” of the site follows a well-established ritual of prayer, weeding as part of cleaning process, planting of trees for shade usually at the centre, the placement of white stones, and finally another prayer to “open” the site for service. The penultimate blessing of the site takes place after all the above and this involves what seems from the descriptions, like a more elaborate affair involving a number of priests and invited guests.

Trees are planted where none exists to provide shade. Church members volunteer their time for the upkeep of the site. The size of the space is dictated by the number of the congregation on each particular site, which can be extended depending on the physical extent of the site.

Figure 2 shows a recent site on private property. It illustrates an arrangement of white stones with 4 entrances and a marked centre, typical of all similar sites by Shembe Church. To the uninitiated there appears to be no logic behind the selection of sites, size and orientation, if any, but according a guided “tour” of one site revealed that men sit separate from women, who in turn sit separate from girls and the priesthood. Furthermore, entrances are also separated in similar fashion, with each entrance oriented towards the centre, which serves as the focal point for all who enter the space.

Every Saturday these “ordinary” urban spaces, majority of which are the postscripts of planning, are activated and come alive as worshippers all dressed in a combination of white and black garb with pieces of traditional Zulu jewellery could be seen gathering together for a service. In addition to Saturdays, specials services are held every 14, 23, and 25th of the month for women, men, and girls respectively. Upon further probing, the significance of these dates did could not be readily explained by the informants.

According to some of municipal officials (surplus) public open spaces are occupied mostly without permission, although tacit or informal agreements are granted. More than 25 Shembe sites have been identified by the municipality around the metropolitan area. In one incident a site was actually bought by the church from city council. However, it is noteworthy that once permission has been granted, the site is altered, albeit lightly, to the specific requirements of the Shembe Church. Following a specified set of rituals to mark the site as a worshipping space, strict rules governing entrance into the space are introduced, including removing ones shoes. Although all are welcome for prayers, and the site alterations slight, there is an implicit assumption that these spaces are now to be regarded as religious sites (and “belong” to the Shembe church), to the exclusion of other uses.

6. Part of the way forward

This practice by the Shembe Church poses numerous challenges for planning as to the appropriate response. What should planners and policy makers do in the face of such a practice? Are such “spontaneous self-diversification among urban population,” as Jacobs (1961) dubbed similar acts of difference and diversity in the city, to be nurtured and embraced in the formulation of policies and plans? A decision of some sort has to be made and action taken as about every facet of urban infrastructure.

Part of the way forward may be found in that dog-eared, well-thumbed copy of Jane Jacobs (ibid), her argument for the need to embrace such practices; Young’s (1990) conception of justice, the notion of cultural imperialism in particular; Sandercock’s (1998, 2000) and Qadeer’s (1997) discussions on the limitations of modern planning in contexts that are increasingly marked by multiculturalism and the need to transcend the limitations through *inter alia*, a process of inclusion; Harvey’s (1992) concept of Social Justice as universal meta-narrative that transcends issues of otherness; and a host of writers concerned with issues of diversity and difference. Also, Schon’s (1993) reflective practitioner is also relevant in this context of contested meanings and diverse value systems.

Armed with these perspectives, we could try to “decode” the seemingly random and indiscriminate siting of these spaces in order to celebrate difference, perhaps develop empathies for “otherness” in the city; or allow such practices to “...stand forth with their difference acknowledged and respected, though perhaps not completely understood, by others” (Young, 1990, p. 108). The approach by the local authority seems ambiguous and halting. On one hand they seem to accept “open-air temples to exist, while on the other preventing emergence of new ones post 2015 without clear rationale for the cut-off point.” Harvey and Schon above would not approve.

Identifying relevant sites involves an element of flaneurism by church members may be necessary to discover potential sites. With this ability to navigate urban terrain and to identify “suitable

spaces,” the Shembes seem not bothered to follow conventional planning regulations for space and its designated purpose in the municipal zoning scheme. They seem to stake a claim on the urban environment without demanding legal ownership, and with a rather uncanny ability to transform the mundane into the transcendental, and in the process reshape urban space.

Once a site has been identified, and a process of negotiation with owners concluded, sites are then transformed into sacred spaces following the process alluded earlier. It is therefore not surprising that thus far, the uses have not turned out to be conflictual, and the forces of law have not yet decided to impose some authoritarian solution. Instead there seems to be a polite nod on the part of the municipality, which may suffice in the short-term.

There is a sense in which it could be argued, and rather convincingly, that this practice by spatial practice by the Shembe Church is posing a question as to who has a right to decide on the correct way to use public space? Through a combination of negotiation with relevant owners, and a rather footloose use of space, the Church introduces a less onerous method for land use management. The Shembe Church is, in a sense, creating a parallel city, a city with a different tempo, value system, and character, utilising the fabric of the current city. Their city registers on a different scale and answers a different set of needs. The Church of Nazareth is creating islands of tranquillity, serene spaces amidst the hustle and haggling, where, according to the informants all are welcome for a pause, a moment of reflection, and prayer irrespective of one’s religious persuasion.

The foregoing raises epistemological challenges around the limitations of modern planning, much about which has been written in planning literature (some refs). Modernism and other fashionable meta-paradigms (Global Cities, World Cities) have come under criticism for failing to adequately account for the diversity of urban practices (Baum, 1996; Dear, 2002; Murray, 2004; Sandercock, 1998; Verma, 1996). This diversity is a product of historically specific practices that connect with local circumstances in particular ways (Murray, 2004).

The privileging of mainly western epistemology that does not adequately account for this diversity of urban experiences is regarded as problematic. The deconstruction of these predominantly western universal narratives is one of the major achievements of the radical critique of the past couple of decades. But the ground had already been laid long before as Harvey (op cit.) rightfully noted. Subsequently many scholars have argued for a need to shift from these largely western narratives of urban studies. In the words of Massey (2001) “the urban future lies neither in Chicago nor Los Angeles; it instead lies in the ‘Third World’ cities like Rio de Janeiro, Mumbai, Hong Kong”. Roy (2005) rightfully argues that urban studies are marked by a paradox where much of innovative urban growth of the 21st century is occurring in developing world cities while many urban theories of how cities function remain rooted in the developed world.

This meant that all forms of meta-theories are either misplaced or illegitimate because they fail to account for the diversity of experiences. Instead, alternative epistemologies, which speak to particular contexts, are touted as more relevant. These fragmented discourses were regarded as more grounded because they articulated particular local circumstances in which individuals and groups found themselves. But at the same time fragmented discourses could never go beyond challenging particular issues affecting their groups or members. This fails to address the broader system in which the particular issues are embedded.

Similarly, the spatial practice by Shembe and other similar uses articulate particular issues, advocate for the rights of their constituencies whose ignored needs are symptoms of a much broader issue of marginalisation and discrimination in society. Although it may be hard to fault the sentiment for embracing the Shembe practice by acquiescing to the request for space as an act of “spontaneous self-diversification” of which Jacobs (op cit.) speak, “its operationalization is fraught with difficulties, especially in the South African context where apartheid perverted and manipulated group differences for political ends” (Mchunu, 2005).

The deconstruction of dominant approaches to planning as a universal basis for action although significant, left in its wake a plethora of fragmented discourses whose legitimacy obtains from being grounded in the particularities of their contexts. This either drains the legitimacy of state policy in the face of such a multitude of voices all clamouring to be heard and accommodated, or at worst attribute such policies to serving the sole interest of the ruling class that Plato's Republic admonished about and the history of South Africa suggest.

Also, group identity may provide an opportunistic launching pad for the redistributive claim on public resources (Mchunu, 2005), such as the appropriation of these spaces in this instance. This may be problematic, particularly if the claim is perceived not to be in proportion to the size of the group concerned, and in the context of limited resources (ibid). Yet freedom of city life encourages diversity, "the openness to unassimilated otherness" (Young, 1990).

The suggestion to engage as Jacobs (op cit.) advocated also raises other concerns that Harvey (op cit.) highlights as problematic: in what ways can for example informality (shantytowns, street vendors), homelessness, gang turf-warfare's and the like be understood as "spontaneous self-diversification"?

7. Concluding remarks

The paper analysed and discussed the challenge posed by the Nazareth Baptist Church and other similar practices of using urban space in "unconventional" ways. The halting nature of state intervention in this case suggest an inability and/or lack of will to transform in light of challenging demands on both for planning theory and practice to be more responsive to such expressions of diversity. Too often planners have been found wanting or downright bested in their attempts at intervention of some kind.

The cautious approach by authorities may prove to be well-suited to dealing with such challenges. However, Sandercock (2000, p. 6) began spelling out some of the elements required for planning practice to engage more meaningfully with the practice such as the Shembe Church:

Dialogue and negotiation across the gulf of cultural difference requires its practitioners to be fluent in a range of ways of knowing and communicating. Something more than the tool-kit of negotiation and mediation is needed, some "method," which complements but also transcends the highly rational process typical of the communicative action model.

Similar to other expressions of "spontaneous self-diversification" in the city, the official response could either be characterised as respectful, or as approving, as suggested by Jacobs (1961), in the sense that there has never been any violent confrontation by the city or members of the public.

In another sense the official response has been uninspiringly halting and at best acquiescing irrespective of where these religious sites may be occurring. This polite "openness to unassimilated otherness" (Young, 1990) may be all that planners could do yet, liberating public space for the heterogeneity that comes with the mixing of religions and other expressions of diversity in public space.

To this view I also bring her notion of cultural imperialism as one of what she describes as the "five faces" of oppression, which "the dominant meanings of a society render the particular perspective of one's own group invisible at the same time as they stereotype one's group and mark it out as the Other." However, this is not to suggest the rest of her views on justice are not relevant, cultural imperialism speaks more to the issue at hand.

Schon (1993, p. 18) called to attention the "mismatch of traditional patterns of practice and knowledge to features of the practice situation—complexity, uncertainty, instability, uniqueness and value conflict." He proposed substitute the idea of reflection in action for the knowledge and application model of positivism and epistemology based on the idea of reflection in action. By this he meant the need to exercise a great deal of caution to ensure that knowledge is robust enough

relative to the complex demands of practice. Too often solutions are too simplistic compared to specific demands of the context at hand.

Such approaches should be underpinned by a higher-order unified discourse, one that transcends the postmodern fragmentation that paralyzes policy formulation. While acknowledging that justice and rationality as unifying discourses take on different meanings across space and time, Harvey (1992, p. 598) also argues that “the existence of everyday meanings to which people do attach importance and which to them appear unproblematic, gives the terms a political and mobilizing power that can never be neglected.”

FLybjerg (1999, 2001) and Peattie (2001) draw attention to Aristotle’s distinction of three forms of knowing; Episteme, which refers to science or knowledge that is fixed and universal; Techne or Technique, what is distinguished as art and craft; and Phronesis, which is defined as knowing what to do in particular circumstances, not generalisable but context-dependent. Phronesis is preferred as the appropriate mode of knowledge for Planning. It is knowledge that is largely experientially determined. This is likely to entail Schon’s (1993) reflection in action on a wide repertoire of similar instances.

In context such as obtainable in South Africa, issues of exclusion and inclusion, domination and marginalisation remain relevant owing largely to the colonial and apartheid pasts. Sensitivity to Young’s notion of justice as discussed above, in particular her idea of cultural imperialism is relevant and inescapable in dealing with instances such as the Shembe practice.

The writers cited above are all grappling progressively about the challenges at hand. They all embody the positive aspects of postmodernism as an opportunity to rethink and re-energise planning theory and practice. If cities are a result of collective creation (Peattie, 1991), “voices from borderlands” that Sandercock (1995) speaks about have become increasingly vociferous in their challenge for planners to re-envision theory and practice to be more inclusive. They show us what is wrong with our cities and suggest ways for addressing some of these challenges. She elaborates further (Sandercock 1995, p. 85) that they:

...describe the state of living on/in the borderlands, living in between, living on the margins...living with uncertainty, living without universals. But they do not live without hope or without meaning. They embrace uncertainty as a potential space of radical openness which nourishes the vision of a more experimental culture, a more tolerant and multifocal one.

The building and sustenance of more inclusive and tolerant cities demands no less than a practice and a pedagogy that embraces the inherent diversity of city-life. Planning is still relevant in assisting to direct the form and scale of mainly government but also private sector investment in cities. It also remains relevant in facilitating a much broader envisioning of the city.

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Note

1. Upon reaching a certain age, boys undergo a process of initiation into manhood which involves prolonged stays in the bush during which, among other things, they are circumcised as a rite of passage into manhood. Communities were forced to improvise as a way out of the impasse as these spaces were not provided for in official plans.

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