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## **South Africa as postcolonial heterotopia: The racialized experience of place and space**

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**ABSTRACT:** This essay claims that heterotopia is characteristic of post-Apartheid South Africa, i.e. where heterotopia is usually the exception in society, it is the norm in South Africa. This claim reinterprets and expands Foucault's concept: heterotopia here refers to the racialization of place and space, and hence to otherness and difference as primary. The ubiquity of heterotopia post-Apartheid is evident in the life-worlds of white suburbia and the black township. A case study is undertaken of white suburbia through a series of phenomenological descriptions of contemporary South Africa using heterotopia as a heuristic tool. This study demonstrates how Foucault's notion of heterotopia is relevant but also too narrow when related to the postcolonial context. An expanded notion of the term as denoting a racialized experience of space and place is necessary for the purposes of coming to terms with the strangeness of post-Apartheid South Africa, where contradiction and otherness are the norm rather than the exception.

**Keywords:** Apartheid, Foucault, heterotopia, postcolonialism, South Africa, whiteness

### **1. Introduction**

In this essay, I both draw upon and expand Foucault's notion of heterotopia. On the one hand, I show that conditions within contemporary South Africa can be characterized in terms of the six principles of heterotopia Foucault delineates in his essay, *Of Other Spaces*. On the other hand, my analysis of white suburbia shows that the South-African postcolonial context calls for an expansion of heterotopia as not merely *a specific place* or a *type of space* within society, but in phenomenological terms – in terms, that is, of people's experiences of and within place and space. My essay thus focuses not only on "the relational 'difference' [of the heterotopia] ... from the ordinary"<sup>1</sup> spatial constructs of society, but also on the experience of alterity and otherness it effects.<sup>2</sup> Lefebvre argues that

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Johnson, "History of the Concept of Heterotopia" (revised), *Heterotopia Studies* (website), <http://www.heterotopiastudies.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Brief-History-of-the-Concept-of-Heterotopia-word-dec-2016-pdf.pdf> (2016), 6.

<sup>2</sup> This has also motivated my use of the Miskowiec translation in "Of Other Spaces" (1986) instead of Hurley's translation in "Different Spaces" (1998). The

heterotopias concern “mutually repellant spaces;”<sup>3</sup> the *postcolonial heterotopia* as I conceive of it concerns the way in which contradictions arise within the same space through the attempt to keep the (repelling, racialized) other at bay.

This notion of a *heterotopian experience* follows the Foucauldian metaphor of the ship as heterotopia,<sup>4</sup> the heterotopia as a movement through space<sup>5</sup> – in this case the movement through the heterotopia that is South Africa. The key about *South Africa as heterotopia* (with an eye on the case study I undertake below) is that the daily experience of place by many whites is located in an actual place that is the (mostly white) suburbs, a place that contrasts sharply with the actual place of the (mostly black) townships. The important thing to keep in mind regarding the white heterotopian experience is that it is a rupture of the *black* order of things by virtue of its dominance and normalization, i.e. so-called white normativity. Despite the end of Apartheid, which was a rupture of the *white* order of things, whiteness as the norm lives on in the suburbs as a place of retreat for whites who no longer dominate politically. Within this context, whites experience blackness as a rupture in the normalized *white suburban* order of things.<sup>6</sup>

Colonialism and Apartheid shaped the heterotopian realities of contemporary South Africa. As a colony, South Africa can be seen to have been a heterotopia in relation to the “motherland” (i.e. the Netherlands and/or Great Britain), where heterotopia in this colonial sense carries the meaning, as I shall discuss below, of a space where the normal and accepted logic and rules of a society are suspended, such that things that can be done in the heterotopia which are not allowed or accepted in “decent society.” The colony, as an outpost and heterotopia of the colonial powers, was a place where violence, genocide and various inhuman practices were sanctioned. Until the Second World War, when the Holocaust and Nazism brought these practices into their own backyards, such practices – specifically as part of an organized system of oppression, discrimination, and dehumanization – were mostly absent in the countries that undertook European colonial endeavours.

Heterotopia manifests differently within Apartheid and post-Apartheid South Africa. The current façade of fences and walls one finds surrounding suburban areas are

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emphasis on otherness in the former translation is more relevant to my suggestion of the *postcolonial heterotopia*.

<sup>3</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1991 [1974]), 366.

<sup>4</sup> OS, 27.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas L. Dumm, *Michel Foucault and the Politics of Freedom* (Walnut Creek, California: AltaMira Press, 2000), 42.

<sup>6</sup> Angahrad E. Beckett, Paul Bagguley and Tom Campbell, “Foucault, social movements and heterotopic horizons: rupturing the order of things,” *Social Movement Studies: Journal of Social, Cultural and Political Protest* 20 (2016), 4.

superior even to what one might find at the actual borders of the country. This heterotopia shift is indicative of the privatization of a new Apartheid apparatus of security that ensures the insulation of suburbia from most of the socio-economic realities beyond. A phenomenology of white suburbia in post-Apartheid South Africa thus frames suburbia as a socio-economic extension of the metaphorical *laager*. The *laager* was a battle formation used by the *Voortrekkers*, the Dutch-speaking Boers who migrated out of the British controlled Cape Colony through the Great Trek during the mid-nineteenth century into the interior of modern-day South Africa. When they were attacked, the *Voortrekkers* would draw their ox wagons into a circle to form a protective barrier and would then engage the battle with firearms from within. This practice of *laertrek*, (i.e. to draw up a circle of wagons and hide inside the *laager*) became a metaphor for the insulated Apartheid state, where there was an emphasis on the various borders of the country: the national border (Afrikaans: *Die Grens*) that had to be safeguarded by the defense force from various “dangers,” including communism and terrorism; the administrative borders of the so-called black homelands (*bantustans*) established by the Apartheid government; and the borders of the black townships on the fringes of urban areas that were patrolled by the police force.<sup>7</sup> As a *laager*, white suburbia can be seen to function as a contemporary South African continuation of the Fanonian dialectic between master and slave – a more intricate experience of mastery and slavery, namely the “messy’ dialectic”<sup>8</sup> between white and black.

As I will show in what follows, within a postcolonial context, and within contemporary South Africa more specifically, heterotopia paradoxically becomes the norm, a place or space where people find themselves, something which shapes their experience, on a regular and even daily basis. Despite its prevalence, this space or place remains a heterotopia because it is defined by its otherness in relation to other spaces, places, and experiences. There exists a kind of counteraction between places, spaces, and experiences which function, as Foucault highlights in his essay, as mirrors for one another. The notion of a postcolonial heterotopia in this sense thus follows the idea of Hetherington that “heterotopia are places of Otherness”, i.e. Otherness “as different to norms within or between cultures *in excessive of or incongruous to* the normative standards of a socio-cultural or historical position.”<sup>9</sup> That the ordering of space within South Africa produced by

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<sup>7</sup> This is a general account of the *laager* and its link to Apartheid South Africa. For a number of good historical accounts about whites during Apartheid, see: Jamie Miller, *An African Volk* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016); Herman Giliomee, *The Afrikaners*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2009); Gerald L’ange, *The White Africans* (South Africa: Jonathan Ball Publishers, 2005); Allister Sparks, *The Mind of South Africa* (London: Mandarin, 1991).

<sup>8</sup> Robyn Marasco, *The Highway of Despair: Critical Theory after Hegel* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 148.

<sup>9</sup> Derek Hook and Michele Vrdoljak, “Gated communities, heterotopia and ‘rights’ of privilege: a ‘heterotopology’ of the South African security-park,” *Geoforum* 33 (2002), 210. Their emphasis.

colonialism and Apartheid remains post-Apartheid is apparent in current relations between white suburbia and the poor black townships: otherness shapes these spaces and, hence, experiences of and within them. Through exploring this spatial ordering and its effects, my analysis will thus elucidate how an expanded, phenomenological and postcolonial sense of heterotopia is closely linked to what Soja identifies as “the spatialization of history [in Foucault’s interpretation of space], the making of history entwined with the social production of space, the structuring of a historical geography.”<sup>10</sup> In short, we are dealing here with contrasting, and ethically precarious, co-existing realities.

## 2. Foucault’s notion of heterotopia

Heterotopia has a small place in Foucault’s *oeuvre*, limited to the essays *Of Other Spaces* and *Different Spaces*<sup>11</sup> and the preface to *The Order of Things*.<sup>12</sup> At the same time, heterotopia does reflect “Foucault’s wider questioning of the complexity of resisting power relations.”<sup>13</sup> According to Beckett et al, heterotopia must be construed in terms of Foucault’s work in *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1*, which focus on the process of subjectivation and how it is framed by an ordering of things formed through the normalising rationalities of government. Foucault viewed heterotopia as a possibility for, or making possible of, a type of rupture or form of resistance “in this *order of things*.”<sup>14</sup> This notion of heterotopia as a rupture of prevailing modes of thought and existence should be kept in mind when thinking about whiteness, as I will shortly illustrate.

Heterotopia and its six principles are discussed in *Of Other Spaces*.<sup>15</sup> In that text, Foucault offers two possible meanings of the concept. First, it could be a space (such as a brothel) where the normal and accepted logic and rules of a society are suspended. In other words, things can be done in a heterotopia that are not allowed or accepted in “decent society.” Secondly, heterotopia can be defined as a designated space within or outside of society (such as a religious colony) that functions as a kind of mirror to the state of affairs

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<sup>10</sup> Edward W. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London: Verso, 1989), 18.

<sup>11</sup> Michel Foucault, “Different Spaces,” translated by Robert Hurley, in *Essential Works of Michel Foucault 1954 – 1984, Volume 2: Aesthetics, Method and Epistemology*, ed. James Faubion (London, Penguin: 1998 [1967]), 175-185.

<sup>12</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (London: Routledge, 1989 [1966]).

<sup>13</sup> Peter Johnson, “Unravelling Foucault’s Different Spaces,” *History of the Human Sciences* 19.4 (2006), 86.

<sup>14</sup> Beckett, Bagguley and Campbell, 4. Their emphasis.

<sup>15</sup> Michel Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” translated by J. Miscowiec, *Diacritics* 26.1 (1986 [1967]): 22-27. Reference to Foucault’s text will further be denoted with the abbreviation OS.

within society, be it as a mirror of perfection or imperfection.<sup>16</sup> The point is that heterotopias consist of strong contradictions, and more specifically contradictions between what society should be like and what society actually is.

The *first* principle of heterotopia, which makes it so significant for Foucault, is that heterotopias are found in all cultures or human societies, although their forms and types vary from one context to the next. Nevertheless, Foucault identifies two main categories.<sup>17</sup> The *heterotopia of crisis* is a space where “there are privileged or sacred or forbidden places, reserved for individuals who are, in relation to society and the human environment in which they live, in a state of crisis.”<sup>18</sup> Foucault’s examples here include adolescents, menstruating or pregnant women, and the elderly (for whom the crises of declining health and death are likely to be more acutely felt). Foucault associates heterotopias of crisis with primitive societies, although the idea of an individual in crisis who needs to be placed somewhere apart from society remains in modern societies. Examples here include boarding schools or military service for young men, both focusing on normalizing and or rehabilitating young men.<sup>19</sup> Second, the *heterotopia of deviance* is a space “where individuals whose behavior is deviant in relation to the required mean or norm are placed.”<sup>20</sup> Here Foucault has in mind psychiatric hospitals, retirement homes for the elderly (where they can deviate from the productive norm of work to permanently rest), and prisons. The heterotopia of deviance is slowly displacing that of crisis due to the development of modern and administrative-bureaucratic notions of normativity and discipline.

The *second* principle concerns the multiple functions that space and place have with respect to the passage of time. Foucault says that

a society, as its history unfolds, can make an existing heterotopia function in a very different fashion... each has a precise and determined function within society and the same heterotopia can, according to the synchrony of the culture in which it occurs, have one function or another.<sup>21</sup>

An instance here would be cemeteries, which acquire different meanings in societies where there is a move away from a religious to an atheistic viewpoint. This second principle could in a sense be said to undercut the first because the meaning of crisis and deviance, and of those who are deemed to be deviant or in crisis, can change within a society as history unfolds and old epistemes recede whilst new ones become dominant.

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<sup>16</sup> OS, 24 & 27.

<sup>17</sup> OS, 24.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> OS, 25.

The *third* principle addresses a heterotopia's capacity to juxtapose "in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible."<sup>22</sup> An example here would be a theatre or suburban garden, where aspects from various disparate places around the world are brought together in one space.

The *fourth* principle links heterotopia to slices in time, where it "begins to function at full capacity when men arrive at a sort of absolute break with their traditional time."<sup>23</sup> Foucault refers to a slice in time encompassing an absolute break with traditional time as a "heterochrony." As the signal of the constitution of a heterotopia, a heterochrony suspends normal, linear time.<sup>24</sup> This kind of suspension happens in a cemetery, where time is actually interrupted and replaced by death, or in museums and monuments where time is displaced in favour of a kind of timelessness.

The *fifth* principle encompasses "a system of opening and closing that both isolates [it] and makes [it] penetrable."<sup>25</sup> This means that a heterotopian site is not freely accessible to everyone, i.e. it is not a public space *per se*. The reason for this is that entry into such a space is either compulsory, (e.g. in barracks or prisons), or subject to rites and purification, (i.e. certain forms of rules, etiquette and behaviour, such as in a Moslem hammam or a Scandinavian sauna).<sup>26</sup>

The *sixth* principle of heterotopia "is that [it has] a relation to all the space that remains,"<sup>27</sup> i.e. it stands in contradistinction to the rest of society. On the one hand, it creates an imaginary space that exposes the illusions of every *real* space in society. On the other hand, its role can be the creation of a space that is radically other to the communal space of daily life. Pertinent examples here would be the two extremes of religious colonies (such as those established by Christians in the so-called New World) and brothels as both, in their respective ways, reflect the apparent best and worst ideals of society.<sup>28</sup>

Heterotopia for Foucault thus refers to certain places or spaces within or outside of society (a place being a specific location, space referring to various locations of a certain type) that have two distinct but not mutually exclusive functions. First, people can go to a heterotopia and do something there that would otherwise be seen as unacceptable in society; in this case the heterotopia is a space of transgression where processes of normalisation are suspended. Second, it can be quite the opposite and instead function as a place where society's processes of normalisation are dominant. In this case, it becomes a place where people are rehabilitated or moulded in society's image. What binds the two

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22 Ibid.

23 OS, 26.

24 Ibid.

25 OS, 26.

26 Ibid.

27 OS, 27.

28 Ibid.

functions together is that heterotopia is a place or space where people go to be isolated from society in order to transgress or normalise. It functions as either a mirror for society's ideals or as an inverse mirror for society's other, for what is considered to be immoral or indecent in society. The mirror can also link up with certain utopian ideas (e.g., a perfect society) and the inverse mirror with certain dystopian ideas (e.g., the disintegration of society) that undermines and unsettles utopia.<sup>29</sup>

I will now turn to white suburbia, one of various locations in South Africa that can be seen as a heterotopia. The rest of the essay will examine and analyze white suburbia across South Africa, thereby expanding the scope of the heterotopia beyond that which Foucault envisioned. What will become apparent is the way in which this expanded (postcolonial) sense is closely linked to what Soja identifies as “the spatialization of history [in Foucault’s interpretation of space], the making of history entwined with the social production of space, the structuring of a historical geography.”<sup>30</sup> The ordering of space within South Africa was historically produced by Apartheid; post-Apartheid, this ordering has continued in ways that constitute both suburbia and the township as the heterotopia of the other.

### 3. A phenomenology of suburban whiteness in the South African heterotopia

The definition of heterotopia as “the way in which radically different social spaces can come into connection with one another” aptly describes both the life-world of white suburbia in South Africa and its contact with the world outside its boundaries.<sup>31</sup> In what follows, I will examine the phenomenon of white suburbia using Foucault’s principles of heterotopia as a grid through which to interpret both whiteness and the relation between suburban whites and the black poor. The analysis of white suburbia in terms of heterotopia reveals it, specifically, as a simultaneously insular and porous space characterized by contradictory realities and relationships (i.e., to the black other) that unsettle normative whiteness.<sup>32</sup>

#### 3.1 Crisis and deviance in the white suburbs

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<sup>29</sup> Johnson, 82.

<sup>30</sup> Soja, 18.

<sup>31</sup> Tony Schirato, Geoff Danaher, and Jen Webb, *Understanding Foucault*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Allen and Unwin, 2012), xxi.

<sup>32</sup> I’m deeply indebted to Hook and Vrdoljak’s study regarding the South African security-park as heterotopia. Their study is still a consideration of heterotopia in the more narrow sense as pockets of space inside or outside of society (with the focus on the security-park of Dainfern on the outskirts of Johannesburg). See: Derek Hook and Michele Vrdoljak, “Gated communities, heterotopia and ‘rights’ of privilege: a ‘heterotopology’ of the South African security-park,” *Geoforum* 33 (2002), 195-219.

I suggest that, depending on their location, not only whiteness but blackness as well can function as heterotopias of both crisis and deviance (first principle). The heterotopia of crisis is characterized by a problematization of the body, with race and poverty both marking crisis in South Africa. Race has to do with the bodily physiology of whites and blacks (the brute fact of being born white or black) and being attached to its mere appearance in the Fanonian sense,<sup>33</sup> although it does not involve a transitional stage for the body as is the case for Foucault but rather a permanent bodily feature of fact.<sup>34</sup> Race is a marker of crisis in South Africa because of the persistence of racism, which views the race of another as an “abnormality” of some sort. Steeped in history, race has a way of problematizing the identity of both black and white persons in the country. While the changing context of post-Apartheid South Africa has thus provoked a crisis of (both Afrikaner<sup>35</sup> and English-speaking) white identity for quite some time, race has become an acute marker of crisis for whites due to the history of racism they themselves have perpetuated in the country. This situation of crisis can be understood in terms of *solastalgia*, where people begin to develop forms of depression and mental illness when there is a change in their environment.<sup>36</sup> According to Albrecht (who coined the term), *solastalgia* “exists when there is a recognition that the beloved place in which one resides is under assault ... *solastalgia* is a form of homesickness one experiences when one is still at home.”<sup>37</sup> In a socio-political sense, the condition develops when a change in their environment leads people to *perceive* themselves as victims of their situation, and therefore to feel homesick for the past within the context of their own places of dwelling.

Poverty, on the other hand, is a clear marker of crisis for black South Africans. The poor person’s bodily condition is precarious, being characterized by hunger and ill-health, which leads them to be excluded from certain spaces in society. Poor, mostly black people are placed in areas isolated from the rich and especially the white suburbs. This remnant of Apartheid, now becoming a capitalist phenomenon, is still a significant factor in terms of the dwelling space of the black poor.

In what sense is South Africa a heterotopia of deviance? Ironically, despite the fact that a substantial part (if not a majority) of the country’s population is impoverished, in South Africa poverty is casually considered to be deviant by many suburban whites.

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<sup>33</sup> Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, translated by Charles Lam Markmann (London: Pluto Press, 2008 [1952]), 87.

<sup>34</sup> The transitional stage of the body here refers to the differently embodied subjects placed within heterotopias of crisis or deviance as discussed by Foucault, such as adolescents, pregnant women, people with illness and the elderly and in some cases, criminals or the mentally ill (although in their case, it can also become a permanent stage).

<sup>35</sup> See: Charles Villet, “Loftus as Afrikaner heterotopia: The life world of rugbymentality,” *Image and Text*, 19 (2012), 64-79.

<sup>36</sup> Glenn Albrecht, “Solastalgia,” *Alternatives Journal* 32, 4/5 (2006), 34-36.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, 35.



Beggars (mostly black) are found at almost every traffic light and street corner. The black poor can still be said to be “placed” in townships, informal settlements and squatter camps away from suburban whites, although this now happens due to existential demands, social sanction, and the capitalist economic ordering of society rather than explicit governmental decisions and control, as was the case during Apartheid. The black poor do venture out to white suburbia, often as menial workers, security guards or as beggars. Here one can think of a suburban white stopping at a traffic light and finding a beggar, sometimes kneeling in front of the car, asking for money or food. In some cases, the motorist might look upon the beggar with guilt, in other cases with disgust, thinking of this poor person as abnormal and lazy. There are some suburban whites who find the black poor to be abhorrent and they do not appreciate the invasion of their space, be it public or private. This interpretation of poverty by (some but not all) suburban whites is grossly insensitive and ignorant.

### 3.2 *White existential insecurity and angst*

Heterotopia through the heterochrony (a slice of time) has to do with an absolute break with traditional time (fourth principle).<sup>38</sup> One instance of such a temporal break is the loss of life, or a moment in which the loss of life is a possibility. In South Africa, unnatural and violent loss of life is a regular occurrence. Violent crime in the country, be it murder, assault, or rape, takes place on a daily basis, especially in poorer areas. Deaths on the roads are endemic; thousands die every year as a consequence of reckless driving and drunken pedestrians not adhering to the rules of the road.

The possible daily loss of life leads to a heterotopian experience for suburban whites because this daily danger is *surreal*, lending itself to the proliferation of fearful ideas and emotions (whether founded or unfounded). Daily life consists of obstacles, fears, tribulations, and psychosis as a direct consequence of the (perceived) ubiquity of crime. This situation is intensified when an individual has experienced a situation (a slice of time, hence a heterochrony) in which s/he faced the possibility of death but escaped it somehow. An individual could have been, for example, the victim of a successful or even a botched car hijacking, house break-in, armed robbery, or motor vehicle accident. While such a situation would constitute a surreal experience for all South Africans, for suburban whites it manifests specifically as an experience of a daily life filled with threats and alien others that cannot be trusted. The dwelling space of suburban whites is problematized and thrown into crisis because it can be dangerously invaded by “them.” Suburban whites can afford to erect defenses against these “invasions”, such as electrified fences, house alarms, and private security guards patrolling the suburbs, but the black poor cannot. There is an ambiguity apparent in the security whites receive from the men that patrol their streets because most of these guards are black; hence they come from the very group that is criminalized by the white gaze. These guards are viewed by some with suspicion as

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OS, 26.

“criminals in uniform” (as is also the case with the police, who are also mostly black); alternatively, a distinction is made between “good blacks” (security guards and menial workers) and “bad blacks” (criminals and beggars). Whether the perception of whites is the former or the latter, the presence of black security guards heightens the climate of fear in white suburbia. In South Africa the persistence of violent crime leads suburban whites (but also the black poor) to experience anxiety and stress, which is in part why Altbeker speaks of “a country at war with itself.”<sup>39</sup>

The most significant development in response to this situation where threats to individual life are experienced as both ever-present and imminent is the privatization of security services. I argue that this development has effectively led to the privatization of the Apartheid apparatus, with the line of security now in the suburbs instead of the various borders of the country. Within what Hook refers to as “privatized governance,” the emphasis of responsibility shifts from citizens to taxpayers.<sup>40</sup> Mbembe uses the terminology of “privatization of political sovereignty” to describe the resulting special relationship that emerges between government and business.<sup>41</sup> The statistics tell an interesting tale in this regard: The cost of the private security industry in the country stands at around R60 billion and it employs 487,000 people.<sup>42</sup> What is significant about this number of security officers is that the former South African Defence Force, apart from around 75,000 full-time personnel, had just over half a million citizen-force personnel.<sup>43</sup> In a sense, what used to be half a million white men on stand-by for a crisis situation, has now become half a million private security officers (mostly black) who patrol the suburbs and stand guard in various public spaces to combat high levels of crime.

### 3.3 *White homes as space of anxiety and fear*

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<sup>39</sup> Antony Altbeker, *A Country at War with Itself: South Africa's Crisis of Crime* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball Publishing, 2009).

<sup>40</sup> Derek Hook, *Foucault, Psychology and the Analytics of Power* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 191-192.

<sup>41</sup> Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001), 78.

<sup>42</sup> Anine Kriegler and Mark Shaw, *A Citizen's Guide to Crime Trends in South Africa* (Johannesburg and Cape Town: Johnathan Ball Publishers, 2016), 4.

<sup>43</sup> Noel Stott, “From the SADF to the SANDF: Safeguarding South Africa for a better life for all?,” *Violence and Transition Series*, Vol. 7, (Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, 2002),

<https://www.sa-soldier.com/data/09-SADF-links/UsedPDFs/fronsadftosandf.pdf>.

The juxtaposition of incompatible spaces (third principle)<sup>44</sup> manifests in two ways in South Africa: first, in terms of the heterotopian and incompatible experience of the same space by suburban whites and the black poor and, second, in terms of the paradoxical experience that both groups have of their own dwelling spaces due to the stark contrast between immense wealth and utter poverty within the same city limits, and sometimes even within a stone's throw of each other. These contrasting experiences serve to show how the living space of the suburban white is a heterotopia to the black poor, and *vice versa*. In other words, if the black poor find themselves in the privileged space of the suburban white, their experience of that space is heterotopian. White suburbia is so different from the living space of the black poor that its rules and decorum are incompatible and alien. Likewise, if suburban whites find themselves in the underprivileged space of the black poor, the same heterotopian experience of incompatibility applies with regard to the lifestyle and rules of conduct. In this case many suburban whites, locals and tourists alike, will only enter a township as part of a "township tour" that involves driving through and gawking at the otherness of race and poverty. The incompatible meanings attached to the space of the other reveal the juxtaposition of space in South Africa, with the space of the black poor representing something radically other (and even exotic) for suburban whites across South Africa.

Suburban whites and the black poor also have conflicting experiences with respect to their own respective dwelling spaces. The space of the suburban white is simultaneously a home, a safe haven from the black poor "other," and a place that is in danger of being 'invaded' or violated by that other (i.e. by the vagrant or criminal). Hook and Vrdoljak identify "crime-fear" as a significant factor in terms of the development of the securitized environment of white suburbia, which in turn represents a spatial answer to a social problem or crisis (in this case, crime).<sup>45</sup> Actual instances of, for example, armed robberies produce a general mindset of white suburban hypersecurity characterized by the perception that the whole of life is being threatened.<sup>46</sup> A significant and problematic issue in this case is that of farm murders, the regularity of which has led to claims of white genocide.<sup>47</sup> Real numbers reveal these claims as mere hyperbole; nonetheless, invoking the

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<sup>44</sup> OS, 25.

<sup>45</sup> Hook and Vrdoljak, 211.

<sup>46</sup> The idea of *solastalgia* is here again of relevance, as people view their homes as being under assault.

<sup>47</sup> See: Nickolaus Bauer, "Red October: The Plight of Whites in the New South," *ENCA*, October 10, 2013, <http://www.enca.com/south-africa/red-october-plight-whites-new-south-africa>.

Also: "Allow all white South Africans the right to return to Europe," accessed February 8, 2016, <https://www.change.org/p/european-commission-allow-all-white-south-africans-the-right-to-return-to-europe>.

notion of genocide reveals the mentality of suburban whites, who perceive themselves as being under attack and besieged in the midst of a black South Africa. To make these points is not, however, to diminish the problematic status of farm murders, some of which resemble hate crimes; more worrisome, others involve torture.<sup>48</sup> This brings to mind the tactics used by the security police during Apartheid, which might be an instance that demonstrates how certain forms of violence and violent practices from a colonial society remains in a decolonizing or postcolonial society.

The view of farm murders as genocide is a way for the white middle class to make the problem their own. This leads to the internalization of farm murders but also white poverty by suburban whites as the main factors in their perceived victimisation in post-Apartheid South Africa (even though they are not poor or brutalized in most cases), which further fuels the *solastalgia* they experience in seeing themselves as victims of the system. This mindset leads many suburban whites to reduce the black poor to the irritating vagrant and dangerous criminal, and the common humanity of the “man on the street” is erased. White suburban space needs to be protected and secured in order to deal with this irritation and danger. The space of suburban whiteness thus becomes both home and a strange space of confinement and captivity. The black poor also experience their dwelling space in this paradoxical way; however, the paradox of confinement and captivity manifests very differently within white and black spaces. For the wealthy white this notion is motivated by keeping the other at bay by way of security measures; for the black poor this notion is motivated exactly by their poverty and the lack of security measures that it brings about. Terreblanche<sup>49</sup> notes that the rich (and therefore most whites) are mostly victims of property crime whereas the poor (mostly black and mostly female) are at risk of personal crime.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Statistics show that in the period from 1990 to April 2015, there were 3,494 farm attacks and 1,737 murders. See: Lloyd Phillips, “Farm murder figures – TAU SA,” *Farmer’s Weekly*, April 28, 2015, <http://www.farmersweekly.co.za/agri-news/south-africa/farm-murder-figures-tau-sa/>.

This means though that the murder rate for farm murders can be as high as 132 per 100,000. The current national murder rate in South Africa is 33 per 100,000, or 49 murders per day (statistics for 2014/15). See: Greg Nicolson, “Farm attacks: If only the issue were just black and white,” *Daily Maverick*, August 25, 2015, <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2015-08-25-farm-attacks-if-only-the-issue-were-just-black-and-white/#.WKQdm9J96Hs>. Also see: *South Africa Survey 2016*, edited by Frans Cronje and John Kane-Berman (Johannesburg: South African Institute of Race Relations), 748-749 (about national murder rate).

<sup>49</sup> Sampie Terreblanche, *A History of Inequality in South Africa, 1652 – 2002* (Scottsville: University of Natal Press, 2002), 401.

<sup>50</sup> Violence against (especially black and coloured) women and children is the darker side of post-Apartheid South Africa and the rate of sexual assault is high. The current rate of sexual assault is 99 per 100,000 or 147 offences per day (statistics for 2014/15). See: *South Africa Survey 2016*, 748-749.

### 3.4 *Restricted accessibility to white spaces*

The heterotopia as a system of opening/closing and isolation/penetration (fifth principle)<sup>51</sup> further elucidates interesting juxtapositions of suburban white and poor black spaces within South Africa. For the suburban white, access to the township space of the black poor is possible but undesirable due to its lack of infrastructure and the threat (real or perceived) it poses to the white visitor. Therefore, the space of the black poor is fully accessible to themselves, but access is restricted and even undesirable to the suburban white. The inverse is true regarding the space of the suburban white. That space is accessible to the black poor, but only in a restricted manner and by means of the submissive role of a menial worker, the service role of a security guard (who does not have the quite the same authority of the police) or worse, beggar or thief. Moreover, in certain residential areas, and depending on context and time, colour functions as a signifier of access, with only whites being welcome in certain areas, and only blacks being welcome in others. In many pockets of the city, in other words, this remnant of Apartheid endures.

Perhaps the most readily apparent example of the heterotopian mechanism of restricted access are the boomgates found in affluent neighbourhoods around the country, which literally open and close to visitors and residents, and isolate the neighbourhoods from the criminal “other.” So-called gated communities, townhouse complexes, or security-parks (basically a small town with extended security features that is insulated from the rest of society) are exemplary in this regard. Hook and Vjoldak’s study again emphasizes how these types of residential areas are heterotopias: the restricted access is much like the “influx control” of Apartheid South Africa where black citizens had their movement limited by various measures, such as “signing registers, requiring the permission of empowered parties, [and] possessing the correct ‘documents’ to obtain right of access.”<sup>52</sup> The difference in this case is that the new forms of regulation are not based only on race but also on class, thereby adding a “liberal politics of admission.”<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> OS, 26.

<sup>52</sup> Hook and Vjoldak, 212.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

### 3.5 *The white functions of space*

The multiple functions of heterotopia both historically and in the present (second principle)<sup>54</sup> have direct relevance to the way in which public and private space within South Africa functions differently for different people, depending on their race and/or economic status. Specifically, heterotopia concerns “the highly significant distinction between *dominated* and *appropriated* spaces.”<sup>55</sup> The spaces in South Africa that are dominated and appropriated by whites have become highly private and commercial, whilst predominantly black public spaces are administered by the government. The idea of whiteness has consequently changed because of the mirror that society provides: In Apartheid South Africa, whites saw fewer blacks, and definitely fewer beggars, than they do now. Moreover, in the past socio-economic problems were hidden from view due to a militarized police that ensured no wide scale rupture of white spaces. In a sense, the heterotopia has remained the same post-Apartheid, but its borders have closed in on whites, limiting them to suburbia. The insular bubble of the white Apartheid state has now given way to the punctured bubble of suburbia.<sup>56</sup> The socio-economic problems of the country now stare whites in the face on a daily basis out in the street, so to speak, and, although this does not mean that they necessarily identify with them, exposure to these problems produces a different notion of whiteness. Also, the public and cultural space of white and black, but also of rich and poor, has become a heterotopia to the other, i.e. it seems exotic, foreign and like something from another continent.

A significant phenomenon in this regard is that of so-called domestic workers (mostly black or coloured) cleaning the houses of the middle class (mostly white but also black) and tending their gardens. In other words, the homes of suburban whites are the workplace of their domestic workers. This is a huge source of (sometimes informal) employment and income for the black poor, but the relationship between suburban whites and their domestic workers often takes on an ambivalent power dynamic which poses obvious moral problems. Domestic workers in colonial times were servants, and in the present, many still take on the role of a servant in certain cases.

These multiple and changing functions of public and private space are almost certainly the outcome of the massive inequality found in the country. Where suburban whites live on properties that range from large to massive, the black poor may find themselves squeezed into a room or shack with a number of other people. White suburbia in its many insulated forms is thus a kind of disqualification of the exterior because it makes “the problematics and vulnerabilities of ‘other’ external and surrounding spaces” overt<sup>57</sup> simply through the dynamic that exists between suburban white and black poor.

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<sup>54</sup> OS, 25.

<sup>55</sup> Lefebvre, 164.

<sup>56</sup> I am indebted to Paul Muldoon for this insight.

<sup>57</sup> Hook and Vrdoljak, 215.

The dynamic at work could perhaps be described as follows: Within the dwelling space of the black poor (in the township, informal settlement or squatter camp), private space practically disappears because of poverty; while suburban whites have an expansive notion of private space, for the black poor this notion is alien or non-existent. This separation leads to the moralisation of non-moral issues, namely decorum and etiquette. Some suburban whites, for example, view the black poor as engaging in improper behavior in public. These perceptions become especially engrained within racial relations between white and black: Whites would say that “it is simply the way they are” (an anecdote I hear frequently). The tendency to essentialise the black poor from the outside is strong<sup>58</sup> and the socio-economic root of the different notions of private space is not acknowledged. In sum, “[o]therness is established through a relationship of difference with other sites, such that their presence either provides an unsettling of spatial and social relations or an alternative representation of spatial and social relations.”<sup>59</sup>

### 3.6 White suburbia's other: The heterotopian mirror of the black township

Foucault concludes that the significance of the heterotopia “is that [it has] a relation to all the space that remains,”<sup>60</sup> i.e. it stands in contradistinction to the rest of society (sixth principle). This principle of contradistinction exemplifies the relation between white suburbia and its other, the ubiquitous townships, otherized as “the location” during Apartheid, where the inhabitants are almost exclusively black. The township/location is situated on the outskirts of urban areas (towns and cities); farthest away from white suburbia; and usually near or adjacent to a highway, train tracks or an industrial area, which are simultaneously physical markers of division and buffers between the two areas. Here the word location itself is already ambivalent because it speaks of a certain place (i.e., a specific town or city), but on the other hand it refers to any given location where “they” (blacks) live and are located. As a result of Apartheid urban planning, the location is also usually “messy, ill-constructed and jumbled”<sup>61</sup> in relation to the space of the town itself.

Tabensky provides significant insight about the dynamic concerning the relation between the white space (“settler village”) and the black space (“location”) of Grahamstown (a university town in the Eastern Cape) observing that “at one level, the two parts ... may as well be thought of as two different towns existing at great geographical distance from one another (except, in the first instance, for the presence of cheap labour and

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<sup>58</sup> Fanon elaborates on this tendency to essentialise in chapter five of *Black Skin, White Masks* entitled “The Fact of Blackness.”

<sup>59</sup> Kevin Hetherington, *The Badlands of Modernity: Heterotopia and Social Ordering* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 8.

<sup>60</sup> OS, 27.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid. Foucault’s words in describing the space of daily life that is contrasted by the heterotopia, hence the description of the township as an inverse mirror below.

beggars roaming the white spaces)."<sup>62</sup> Although the public and residential spaces still reflect the Apartheid order, both are now also highly influenced by the capitalist ordering of space: middle class blacks move into suburbs that are predominantly white (i.e. the former white areas of the Apartheid era), but one would be hard pressed to find more than a handful of poor whites moving into the townships.

The township/location thus provides an instance of the heterotopia in the narrow and typical sense, i.e. as a pocket of society that says something about society at large. The impoverished and chaotic ordering of the location/township represents an inverse mirror to white suburbia's organized and wealthy space. The township/location, as white suburbia's other, exposes the paradox of that which is considered perfect and ideal in post-Apartheid society, namely white normativity. Whiteness is the measure of perfection and the ideal to strive for; it is not seen as the actual source of society's problems by whites but rather as the solution to the problem. Here whiteness is in a way both invisible and visible to whites: invisible because whiteness is uncritically seen as the measure of the state of society, but also visible because what the mirror reflects back to whites is blackness. The mirror exposes whiteness as the problem, but ironically this insight remains invisible to many whites. In this respect Vice provides a succinct and deep insight when she says that "[w]hile one's whiteness might still constitute the unacknowledged norm ... that one is white rather than black is always present to oneself and others, barring an impressive feat of self-deception."<sup>63</sup> The problem is that this self-deception is pervasive amongst suburban whites, and therefore perhaps not as impressive as Vice might think. Hook and Vrdoljak says to the contrary that

[r]ather than indications of an inequitable system, these contradictions [in society] are taken up as exactly the measures necessitated by an unfavourable socio-political system, a tactic by which socio-political accountability is deferred and historical privilege is consolidated in the face of profound inequality.<sup>64</sup>

The economic Apartheid that exists post-Apartheid,<sup>65</sup> safeguarding the economic privilege of the majority of whites and keeping in place the impoverishment and subsequent social subjugation of the majority of blacks, is camouflaged by painting whites as victims of the current political regime. This renders black victimhood invisible whilst revealing continuity

<sup>62</sup> Pedro Tabensky, "The Oppressor's Pathology," *Theoria*, 57 (2010): 96.

<sup>63</sup> Samantha Vice, "How Do I Live in This Strange Place?," *Journal of Social Philosophy* 41.3 (2010): 326.

<sup>64</sup> Hook and Vrdoljak, 214.

<sup>65</sup> See: Peter S. Goodman, "End of Apartheid in South Africa? Not in Economic Terms", *New York Times*, 24 October, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/24/business/south-africa-economy-apartheid.html?smid=fb-share>.



with Apartheid South Africa in the acceptance of whiteness and whitely ways as the norm by which to measure the state of South African society.<sup>66</sup>

#### **4. Concluding remarks: The heterotopian experience of whites, their nervous condition of white victimhood, and the Euro-African Thirdspace**

I would like to conclude with three remarks about the place of white suburban heterotopia in contemporary South Africa that can provide avenues for further research regarding the heterotopian experience and the Euro-African fabric of South African society.

The first insight is a stronger and more expansive version of the claim that suburban whiteness functions as a specific kind of heterotopian experience in South Africa. This would be the claim that whiteness (e.g. suburban whiteness) will always lead to a heterotopian experience when it encounters that which is not white, especially in the postcolonial context but also where immigrants and refugees are encountered by the white gaze in the European and American context. For instance, the nationalist and xenophobic undertones of Donald Trump's ascendancy to the U.S. Presidency point to a heterotopian experience by many U.S. whites. Trump's insistence on building The Wall on the Mexican border speaks to the "common man" by making America sound like a yard in the neighbourhood, very much like the white suburbs in South Africa, that needs not only to be fenced off, but which also requires a large physical edifice that can keep any purported dangers from Mexico at bay.

What also characterizes Trumpism is the phenomenon of *solastalgia*, where people view themselves as victims and hence become homesick or nostalgic for the past in light of a changing environment at home. To recap, Albrecht says that *solastalgia* "exists when there is a recognition that the beloved place in which one resides is under assault."<sup>67</sup> The American context seems to also be characterized by *solastalgia*, with the perception of many whites that their beloved place is under existential threat. Trump's slogan of "Make America Great Again" is a prime example of a politician who ran a campaign of *solastalgia* that targeted so-called white victimhood, convincing the white middle class that they are victims because of cultural and political changes in America. These changes allegedly endanger white, suburban values and hence there is the need to "take back America." Trump's mention of so-called "American carnage" in his inaugural address<sup>68</sup> fits squarely into this narrative of victimhood and forms the imaginary basis for what can be

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<sup>66</sup> See: Savo Heleta, "White privilege and hypocrisy in South Africa", *Africa is a Country*, 6 November, 2016, <http://africasacountry.com/2017/11/white-privilege-and-hypocrisy-in-south-africa/>.

<sup>67</sup> Albrecht, 35.

<sup>68</sup> Donald Trump, "Inaugural address: Trump's full speech," accessed February 8, 2017, <http://edition.cnn.com/2017/01/20/politics/trump-inaugural-address/> (transcript and video).

characterized as an *American laager* that is made secure by The Wall and attempts at a Muslim ban.

The second insight is a claim that I would make about this heterotopian experience by whites, namely that it constitutes a kind of “nervous condition” they have in relation to their situation in post-Apartheid South Africa. Fanon used this term to describe both the socio-political and the socio-psychological situation of natives in colonial and decolonising societies. These nervous conditions of the natives were maintained by the settlers during colonial times as the natives developed an inferiority complex in the course of their violent oppression.<sup>69</sup> South Africa is a country that has gone through various waves of decolonisation: Apartheid itself was a nationalist attempt by Afrikaners to free themselves from the yolk of British rule. This was done at the expense of the black population, who were oppressed and excluded in a highly racist society where Antjie Krog also identified nervous conditions among working class Afrikaners during Apartheid.<sup>70</sup>

My claim is that the wave of decolonisation following Apartheid by blacks from the yolk of white rule has kept these nervous conditions in place, albeit in different forms. One of these forms is the nervous condition that I would refer to as so-called “white victimhood”, which can be identified in the various phenomenological descriptions of life in suburbia. This is probably only one of a variety of nervous conditions for white and black due to their heterotopian experiences in South Africa. I would contend that the nervous condition identified by Krog among whites has shifted from the working class to the middle class, which has taken on the plight and challenges (such as poverty and farm murders) of the working class as their own. What is interesting about this white nervous condition is that it inverts (or subverts) the idea that whiteness holds power and domination, claiming instead that whites are actually victims of the post-Apartheid situation. This could be a hybrid of actual lived experiences and/or constructed beliefs, but it could also be a kind of tactic or strategy. “White victimhood” ultimately masks the continued reality of white economic mastery and the privileges attached to whiteness beyond Apartheid.<sup>71</sup>

The third insight is that heterotopian experience of South Africa reveals an inverse mirror for both Europe and Africa, representing “the crisis of European Man,” to make use

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<sup>69</sup> Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, translated by Constance Farrington (London: Penguin Books, 1967 [1961]), 17.

<sup>70</sup> Antjie Krog, “...between the nose and the mouth. Perhaps more towards the eyes,” in *Some Afrikaners revisited*, by David Goldblatt (Roggebaai: Umuzi, 2007), 32.

<sup>71</sup> I explore this form of victimhood in South Africa and its link to Donald Trump elsewhere in an online article. See: Charles Villet, “Donald Trump, white victimhood and the South African far-right,” *The Conversation Africa*, 23 February, 2017, <https://theconversation.com/donald-trump-white-victimhood-and-the-south-african-far-right-73400>.

of Lewis Gordon's phrase,<sup>72</sup> and turns the gaze of criticism on European Man but also his extensions of affluence and consumerism. This reversal of the critical gaze shows how European Man is problematised within South Africa because of the injustices of poverty and racism which continue in the country beyond Apartheid as a consequence of industrialization and globalisation. The mirror further reflects modern "African Man," who is also in crisis because of the way he is radically objectified. This mix of European and African spaces and ideas constitutes what one could call the Euro-African fabric of society (to borrow from the Comaroffs' phrase regarding Euro-America<sup>73</sup>). The problem of the Euro-African is represented by the complexities of human relations as it manifests and is fractured by heterotopian experience, i.e. the racialised experience of space by white and black.

Whites who come from Europe have told me that they were never as aware of their whiteness until they spent time in South Africa, but blacks from elsewhere in Africa tell me the same thing about an awareness of their blackness. This situation might not be unique to South Africa but finds its clearest expression within the country's stark division between white and black as well as rich and poor, which also sees the entrenchment of new forms of oppression. In the end, the country is also a mirror to the rest of the world about the vast inequities and injustices of globalisation. Where these inequities and injustices are found in places that are continents apart, in South Africa they are found in the same country, which is why there really is a tale of two countries to be told. The country is representative of the so-called Thirdspace that Soja and Bhaba talks about, in this case a Euro-African Thirdspace.<sup>74</sup> Therefore, it is crucial to follow the course of South Africa beyond Apartheid as it could give some clues as to the direction of world history and new forms of Apartheid in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In short, the future of the next century will not be utopian or dystopian but rather a combination of both. The heterotopia could be the reality of a brave new world in the coming century.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Lewis R. Gordon, *Fanon and the Crisis of European Man: An Essay on Philosophy and the Human Sciences* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

<sup>73</sup> John Comaroff and Jean Comaroff, *Theory from the South: Or, How Euro-America is Evolving Toward Africa* (Boulder, Colorado and London: Paradigm, 2012).

<sup>74</sup> Richard Peet, *Modern Geographical Thought* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1998), 225.

<sup>75</sup> I am indebted to the editors of the special issue, Dianna Taylor and Joanna Crosby, whose help in editing and rewriting this essay has been invaluable in terms of its focus and clarity. Thanks is also due to an anonymous referee who provided a thoughtful critique that helped to identify problems in the essay.

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