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Mapping places and people in a settler society: 
From discrepancy to good fit over one century of South African censuses

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Abstract.— The dynamics of population and urbanization in South Africa have been recorded by a remarkable set of censuses during the 20th century. These censuses indicate a changing hierarchy of places that is typical of a settler society and of its representations of space and society. Over one century, the official census places and the pattern of population distribution have shifted from a selective colonial view of human settlements to an inclusive postcolonial society view closer to the distribution of the whole population.

South Africa • Apartheid • Demographic history • Census • Census places • Population patterns • Settlement • Urbanization

Résumé.— Depuis plus d’un siècle, l’Afrique du Sud a connu une remarquable série de recensements. Ceux-ci enregistrent la dynamique du peuplement dans le cadre de catégories socio-spatiales changeantes et liées aux représentations et projets successifs : coloniaux, d’apartheid et post-apartheid. Les premiers recensements proposaient une hiérarchisation des lieux typiques d’une colonie de peuplement. Le mouvement d’urbanisation, impliquant les populations non européennes, s’est traduit par l’évolution de la représentation officielle avec une reconnaissance progressive de localités autochtones. Sur un siècle, la géographie officielle des lieux de peuplement sud-africains est passée d’une perspective de société de pionniers à une perspective postcoloniale reconnaissant l’ensemble des communautés à travers leurs espaces.

Afrique du sud • Apartheid • Démographie historique • Dynamique du peuplement • Localités • Recensement • Urbanisation • Urbanisation fragmentée

Resumen.— Desde mas de un siglo, Africa del sur ha conocido una destacable serie de censos. Estos registran la dinámica del poblamiento en el marco de las categorías socio-espaciales ligadas a las representaciones y a los proyectos sucesivos: coloniales, de apartheid y post-apartheid. Los primeros censos proponían una jerarquización de los lugares típicos de una colonia de poblamiento. El movimiento de urbanización, integrando a las poblaciones no-europeas, se ha traducido por la evolución de la representación oficial con un reconocimiento progresivo de las localidades autoctonas.

En un siglo, la geografía oficial de los lugares de poblamiento sur-africanos ha saltado de una perspectiva de sociedad de pioneros a una perspectiva postcolonial reconociendo el conjunto de las comunidades a través de sus espacios.

Africa del sur • Apartheid • Demografia historica • Dinamica del poblamiento • Localidades • Censo • Urbanizacion • Urbanizacion fragmentada

South Africa has a population of more than 50 million inhabitants, more than 60% of whom were urban residents in 2008. The country has a long-standing network of metropolitan areas, towns and localities (places). These have
developed and become hierarchized over the course of a history during which population settlement and its distribution have been markedly influenced by colonisation, segregation, industrialisation and globalisation.

An outstanding set of statistics on population distribution dating from the colonial era at the start of the 20th century is available for South Africa. These data were compiled and presented in a succession of contexts, each very specific in nature: first, the Union of the British ex-colonies and the Boer Republics, which is still very colonial in style, then, the apartheid regime, and finally, post-apartheid South Africa. Systematising census operations, and the social and spatial classifications upon which this is based, underpin national control strategies in settler societies (Bouchard, 2000). This has been studied in particular for the United States (Hannah, 2000). More generally speaking, political geography has used Foucault’s work on “gouvernementalité” and related technologies (2004a et b) to study the implementation of “geo-powers” (Toal, 1996; Rose-Redwood, 2006). In the case of South Africa, this process has been characterised by breaks and marked changes in the spatial categories used, which reflect the successive political systems and governing technologies according to the settler society representations of space and landscape (Mbembe, 2000; Trigger, Griffiths, 2003). The successive periods led to the creation and redefinition of social categories and spatial frameworks: segregationist engineering in the territorial, social and political fields, to which statistical data and its processing were subordinated until the end of the apartheid system; and territorial reforms aiming to abolish segregationist legal regimes and to reinstate the country and its cities within the globalisation process. According to evolutive territorial engineering, the successive censuses implemented a changing hierarchy of places.

We propose here a dynamic cartographic analysis of both the effective distribution of the population and the evolution and distribution of the official localities. The main question for each census period is: amongst the whole population distribution pattern, which settlements are successively considered as official localities, and why? The findings reveal the evolution of representations of space and population in a settler society and on the related gap with effective population distribution and urbanisation.

1. Methodology

The DYSTURB database (Giraut, Vacchiani-Marcuzzo, 2009) used here collates, harmonises, geo-references and inter-relates in time all political and administrative maps for districts, urban agglomerations and places as well as the population figures for all South African entities, both urban and rural, since 1911. This makes it possible to retrace the history of one century of population and settlement distribution, urbanisation and territorial engineering in South Africa. The demographic and administrative datasets according to the entity considered can thus be processed in the long term and re-aggregated in constant, present or past functional and administrative spatial frameworks (boxout 1).

Throughout the past century, classic changes in borders and nomenclature were added to changes in category and distinctions in terms of status that were applied to entities of the same nature. Paradoxically, distinctions among individuals on the basis of race and origin, which formed the basis of the racist political order until the end of apartheid, generate only minor difficulties in statistical follow-up. Indeed, these distinctions, already present in the colonial era, were maintained, refined and made
more rigid in the apartheid period. Thus, for the censuses, they were implemented in a fairly stable manner, although there were some changes in denomination. An under-estimation of the black population should be noted at the time of the “grand apartheid” policy, culminating with the census of 1985, which is not retained in this database for reasons of data reliability.

The spatial frameworks within which the censuses were compiled are far less stable. Until 1991, official urban population was given by places, and rural population was aggregated by magisterial district. Enumerations were conducted within heterogeneous frames with major changes not only in the delimitation and the number of entities (places and districts) up until 1970 but also in their nature and status. The localities or places retained in the censuses underwent considerable changes in number, name and status. The Dysturb database enables follow-up of localities by systematically establishing correspondences despite changes in name or status.

According to this database, the animated population map series (figures 1 and 2) is made with figures aggregated by magisterial district existing for each census, and the animated map series on census places is made with the georeferenced list of official census places for each census (boxout 2).

1. Urban agglomerations: what kind of definition?

In Dysturb database, the localities of census are also gathered by urban area insofar as the double practice of the intra urban buffer zone and of the projection of displaced urban areas beyond the borders of the Bantustans (fig. 4) creates a morphological discontinuity. It makes a specific South African type of both functional and morphological urban areas including large planned buffer zones between core agglomeration, and projected urban fragments. This South African type of urban agglomeration is allowed for the international comparisons based on morphological definition of urban areas (Moriconi-Ebrard, 1993 & 1994; StatSA 2001; Bretagnolle, Pumain & Vacchiani-Marcuzzo, 2009). The authors of Dysturb have used a first association of the cities and their dependant townships carried out by François-Moriconi in the year 1990, supplemented by the work of the HRC, The Two South Africas (1992), and a systematic work (Vacchiani-Marcuzzo, 2005). This last work also took into account the urban displaced areas of the bantustans distant from several tens of kilometers. One can give as an example the town of Bloemfontein, which forms a continuous urban area with its township Mangaung but which in the South-African context must be associated with Botshabelo, a settlement project at several tens of kilometers within the policy framework of the forced removals to form what was initially to be an enclave of Bantustan. The municipality is today called Mangaung and includes parts of the agglomeration.

2. Data and sources

The official general censuses of the South African population were performed by successive official bodies (predecessors of the present-day Statistics South Africa) for the years 1904 (districts and provinces, no data for localities), 1911, 1921, 1936, 1951, 1960, 1970, 1980, 1985, 1991, 1996 and 2001. Three censuses were removed from the geo-referenced database for reasons of data reliability (1985), incomplete data (1904 and 1985), and difficulties in tracing localities longitudinally (1996). Thus, nine censuses, with inter-census gaps of around ten years, comprise the geo-referenced base with longitudinal follow-up over one century of South African localities (places), urban areas (agglomerations) and territories. Where demographic data are available in two modes of enumeration, de jure and de facto, it is systematically the de facto enumeration that is preferred, as it is closer to the actual distribution of the population. Complementary sources (censuses and reports concerning the homelands).

For the year 1991, data concerning the “independent” homelands of Bophuthatswana, Ciskei, Transkei and Venda (TBVC) are derived from official statistical sources in these homelands. In addition, several studies (Graaf, 1986; HRC, 1992; McCarthy, Bernstein, 1998) were used for the former homelands and townships, in particular for the identification of urban agglomerations.

Finally, the reports issued by Statistics South Africa, the South African Institute of Race Relations and the Urban Foundation constitute valuable sources on issues of socio-spatial segregation and habitat that conditioned the distribution of the South African population on various scales.

Additionally, Raper (2004) was the main source of the names of localities, the years of their creation and when they obtained local government status (municipality, different local government councils...).
2. The dynamics of population distribution patterns from the colonial divide to the new metropolitan South Africa with its bantustan inheritance

At the beginning of the 20th century, population distribution in South Africa reflected the rural population of Bantu origin (almost 70% of the 6 million inhabitants in 1911, first general census of the Union of South Africa and only secondarily the distribution of the population of European origin). This mostly rural population was numerous in the eastern part of the Cape of Good Hope province and in Natal and Transvaal. Their distribution constituted a long, broad peripheral belt including the northwest, north and east of the country, where the native reserves set aside for that population by the colonial rule were situated. Except for a few urban districts, the most populated districts were those in the belt made up of native reserves like Zoutpansberg in Northern Transvaal, Umtata in Eastern Cape or Ixopo in central Natal.

Other communities, all linked to past waves of settlers in the Union from Europe (Afrikaners and English), Asia (Indian and Malay) and Southern Africa (Khoïkhoï and San), settled in the less densely populated areas of the country. These communities accounted for one-third of the inhabitants and formed the majority of the urban population. While the English and Indian populations were urban for a large majority and sometimes rural in Natal, the Afrikaners and Coloureds were spread across different environments: cities, small towns and farms distinct from native reserves in former Cape Province, Orange Free State and Transvaal. The three largest urban agglomerations (inner cities, suburbs and locations) were already populated by the different South African communities: the administrative and business city of Cape
Town (85,000 Europeans or Whites and 75,000 Coloureds); the newly booming mining and business city of Johannesburg (120,000 Europeans or Whites, 100,000 Bantus and 15,000 Coloureds and Asians); the industrial and harbour city of Durban (35,000 European or Whites, 35,000 Asians, 20,000 Bantus).

The population distribution map evolves throughout the century under the influence of two processes: a differential growth of populations and massive urbanisation. Over the twentieth century, the differential growth of populations, with different migratory and natural balances according to regions and communities, increased the contrasts between the dense rural areas, the former native reserves, and the rural areas that were managed according to patterns of colonial origin. Despite the demographic pressure, the area of the native reserves remained throughout the century at 13% of the total South African territory, meaning that the land allocated to the African population in collective tenure was under pressure without any scope for extending the cultivated areas and grazing land to accommodate the dramatic increase in rural population density. This fuelled the growing flow of migrant workers and the resulting dependency of the African population on this external income.

The "grand apartheid" period of the 1970s introduced major changes in the settlement patterns. The bantustan or Homeland policy was dedicated to a so-called internal decolonisation with new countries for Black people where they could exercise civil rights. It was also a rationalization of the exploitation pattern at the nation scale with new border industrial developments (Christopher, 2001). In this new pattern, the booming places where located at the margin of the new bantustans close to the South African cities and/or to the new industrial developments. Broadly, the forced removals of population and the restrictions on residential movement imposed on populations of African origin contributed to reinforcing the demographic weight of the former reserves that had become part of the bantustans. Despite these restrictive policies, massive urbanisation is reflected in the growth of Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban and in the emergence of new urban and industrial basins in the mining and industrial north of Natal, the northwest of Orange Free State and in Eastern Cape, with the formation of a conurbation (East London-King William’s Town), which extensively overlaps the homeland of Ciskei. This illustrates the continuing boom of urban growth with the new inclusions of suburban settlements located in the bantustans (Ramutsindela, Donaldson, 2001).

Between 1911 and 2001, South Africa underwent a long phase of intense urban growth. The populations of urban areas of more than 5,000 inhabitants effectively agglomerated. They were officially split into different census places according to the racial classification of their inhabitants and the exclusion of the black townships from the official jurisdictions of the cities, growing by 3.6% on average per year during this period.

The map series clearly shows both a densification of the areas of the former reserves and bantustans and a concentration in the main metropolitan areas. With just a few former reserves and urban areas, the former Orange Free State gathered 10% of the South African population in 1911 but only 6% at the end of the twentieth century. In the same period, the former Natal province still represented 20% of the total population, while the north of South Africa, namely, the former Transvaal, with its large former reserves and metropolitan areas, accounted for more than 45% of the 45 million South African inhabitants in 2001 compared to 25% of the 6 million in 1911.
3. Census places: from colonial settlements to all localities

Up until the 1970s, the map showing localities (census places) corresponds to the local government grid, i.e. to communities that had a recognized right to organize themselves and hence a degree of autonomy. The rural settlements and suburbs enable the identification a few additional places (in particular in the census of 1921) which were subsequently promoted to the status of seats of local government by the presence of a community of European origin. A few places of African origin were recognized as seats of local government in the Transkeian territories and also in Zululand; they were administered as colonial government seats with small colonies of colonial staff warranting their recognition as official places (boxout 3).

The increasing number of census places (figure 3) over one century clearly shows the post-Apartheid swing in the 1990s when the black settlements were counted as individual census places and not as parts of rural populations in each census district. Before that, the logarithmic graph shows slight increases corresponding first to the creation of new European settlements and second in the Apartheid era to the promotion of a few townships as census places differentiated from the cities with which they formed agglomerations.

![Number of census places per census](http://mappemonde.mgm.fr/num34/articles/art12201b.html)

From 1980, the townships, provided with their own specific administrative structures, and the new places promoted in the bantustans formed a new generation of places that were granted recognition within the “grand Apartheid” strategies. In 1991, the separate censuses of the independent bantustans (Transkei, Bophuthatswana, Venda, Ciskei) brought about the systematic identification of places of African rural settlement and urban agglomerations as census places. In this sense, they prefigure the generalization of the census enumerations in the rural areas from 1996 and the 2001 census. Thus, a certain consistency between the distribution of localities and that of population densities finally appears. However, the scatter of dots in urban areas is proportional to the number of suburbs that include the former townships, squatter camps and other agglomerated settlements. Hence, the very high densities of the metropolitan areas are not highlighted in comparison with the high densities of the dense rural areas in former bantustans, which by then were well recognized as made up of numerous small settlements, now full and official localities.
3. Historical official census places making off in South Africa

Until 1991, the localities used in the censuses correspond to the official definition of the urban object. That is, the official list of localities was drawn up in accordance with the status of these localities, which was linked to the origin of the locality and its racial composition more than to its dimensions. The existence of a local government council was the urban definition criterion until 1970.

Localities with a local government body from the 1921 to 1951 census:
A. Municipalities (including Boroughs in Natal and Town and City Councils in Transvaal);
B. Village Management Boards in the Cape provinces and the Orange Free State; Village Councils in Transvaal; Town Boards in Natal;
C. Health Committees in Natal and Transvaal; Local Boards in Cape Town;
D. Local Areas in Cape Town and Transvaal; Public Health Areas in Natal.

The table provided in the CD-ROM annexes entitled “Administrative status and functions of localities” gives dates of creation and allocation of functions through the year 2000 for all localities that were local government seats and/or possessed local government status, even if only elementary (non-urban).

A certain number of localities disappear as places in the course of the period: these are colonial settlement villages or missionary centers which were first identified as fully-fledged places; later, their populations of European origin declined (the case with certain missions), or they were integrated into neighboring municipalities or wider suburbs.

Among the new places appearing before 1970 were villages or suburbs where the growth of the population of European origin led to their local government status and therefore urban status for the censuses. The increase in the number of urban places was thus considerable between 1931 and 1951 (rising from 492 to 722, an increase of around 50%).

The censuses also make it possible to identify a certain number of localities that have no official status as an urban place but that are included in the Dysturb database (table 1). Indeed, the first censuses (1911 and 1921) included lists of towns, villages and rural settlements. In addition, up to 1960, the censuses provide lists of suburbs that are not urban localities but a breakdown of the main metropolitan areas. Finally, retrospective tables enable access to data for places appearing at a later date. In the Dysturb database, localities of this sort (non-official in statistical terms, since only urban places are taken into account) are identified as settlements. Their populations are also included in the total for rural areas in the district to which they belong, which gathers all populations outside urban places.

From 1980, the main Black, Colored or Indian townships not possessing an elected council but recognized as urban localities were also considered as official census localities (urban places). This was in no way a concession to democracy on the part of the Apartheid regime but a mere accounting strategy for the black urban areas liable to be involved in forced removals toward homelands within the ‘grand apartheid’ policy. Thus, more than 350 Black townships appear as urban places in the 1980 census.

In 1991, two so-called “independent” homelands, Bophuthatswana and Transkei performed an exhaustive enumeration of places in their census, i.e. all populations in each district were allocated to a certain place. Thus, for these homelands, there was no longer a non-differentiated “rural” category gathering all the populations that were not considered to belong to an urban place. This precedes the post-Apartheid practices present in the 1996 census where an exhaustive grid of more than 12,000 places was used and the census of 2001 where 2,674 main places were determined and delineated, subdivided into 15,966 subplaces (Vacchiani-Marcuzzo, 2004). The new administrative organization is indeed based on seven geographical scales, and the new subdivisions cover the entire South African territory.

For the database, the correspondences between places of 1991 and prior and those of 2001 were first systematically sought in the subplaces and then for remaining localities among the main places. Of some 4,000 localities (3,923) enumerated in 1991 or before, around 1,430 are presented in the database but have no correspondence with a main place or subplace in 2001 and no geo-referencing. For the most part (1,306 of these 1,430), they are localities noted in Transkei and Bophuthatswana in 1991 alone.

Table 1. Number of census places and subplaces 1911-2001

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<td>Census Places</td>
<td>358</td>
<td>369</td>
<td>492</td>
<td>722</td>
<td>758</td>
<td>874</td>
<td>1108</td>
<td>3706</td>
<td>855</td>
<td>2674</td>
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<td>Settlements, suburbs (1911 a 1960)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>241</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>105</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Subplaces (1996 et 2000)</td>
<td></td>
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<td>12851</td>
<td>15966</td>
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<tr>
<td>Number of places</td>
<td>366</td>
<td>610</td>
<td>508</td>
<td>796</td>
<td>863</td>
<td>874</td>
<td>1108</td>
<td>3706</td>
<td>12851</td>
<td>15966</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. Political and historical perspectives on the evolution of territorial engineering: From colonial order to the post-Apartheid new dispensation

The dynamics of the map of official census places over the 20th century reflect a history of antagonism between places of colonial settlement and the actual distribution of the population. The dense, rural African population in the reserves was, for a long period, not differentiated from the population of rural districts according to the South African colonial pattern. It distinguishes a few colonial places allocated to citizens and to the native reservations; these places were the places of residence of people collectively subjected to community leaders and a regime of common property (Christopher, 1976; Mamdani, 1996; Schmidt, 1996; Houssay-Holzschuch, 1996; Giraut et al., 2005; Giraut, 2005). The urbanization of the period 1970 to 1991, which includes the emergence of the urban townships as census places, the structuring of the bantustans, and the end of apartheid in 1991, which eventually led to the recognition of localities in which the population was of African origin as places. Thus, the map for 2001 shows a scatter of dots corresponding to places with actual population densities outside the metropolitan zones.

The 20th century dynamics of population distribution and the distribution of official places and cities can be seen as a settler society experiencing a postcolonial swing: the progressive involvement and recognition of people of non-European origin in the urbanization process. In the specific case of South Africa, the Apartheid regime, along with the growth of urbanization, allowed the progressive incorporation of some African settlements as census places in order to classify some of the large townships that had developed on the peripheries of all South African cities as urban. However, they were counted separately from the official city as separate municipal bodies, thus prolonging the fragmented spatial structure of the apartheid city (Davies, 1981; Lemon, 1991; Gervais-Lambony, 1997; Christopher, 2001). Townships remained outside of the official city jurisdiction; in addition, the forced removals relegated new urban fragments beyond the homelands borders (figure 4), creating remote but dependant new urban settlements (MacCarthy & Berstein, 1998) with a complex system of pass. The census and territorial engineering of the Apartheid era must be seen as an improvement and an adaptation of the colonial pattern of locations and reserves, for an optimal use of labor without ensuring its reproduction costs. This is O’Meara’s (1983) neomarxist economy oriented rationale approach of the historical and cultural experience of Apartheid. Posel (1997) considered Apartheid as a combination of an ideological plan, a capitalist rationale and a contingent process. However, some authors insist on the essentially ethnocentric and cultural dimension of the ideology of Apartheid. Thiven Reddy (2000) connects it to the colonial cultural work of hegemony (defined by Antonio Gramsci) in shaping the Other, and Giliomee (2003) believes that the foundations of the ideology proceed from a missionary discourse. Schmidt (1996) magistrally demonstrates how Apartheid was replaced as a specific sequence on long-term history of a settler society.

In the apartheid order, the official Apartheid cartography ignores most of the black urban settlements (Stickler, 1990) which were not visible as localities in the census gazettes. This was what the HRC called “shadow South Africa” (1992). Some academics attempted to tackle the officially invisible urban African settlements in a
critical way. Their approaches ranged from identifying and enumerating the forced removals (Platsky, Walker, 1985) and all black urban settlements (Graaf, 1986) to discussing their real functions (Mabin, 1988). Others were involved in urban prospects for optimizing the South African development policies that included the black population (Simkins, 1983, 1986; Urban Foundation, 1990) or in assessing suitable locations for the different urban settlements (Geyer 1989, 2003).

Today in post-Apartheid South Africa, in order to erase the legacy of the official colonial and Apartheid geography and toponymy, there is an ongoing but controversial process to change place names (Giraut et al., 2008; Guyot, Seethal, 2007; Jenkins, 2007). A dictionary of South African place names (Raper, 2004) opens widely to African toponymy, integrating numerous allonyms; however, it continues to ignore part of the former “shadow South Africa:” distant townships, townships or concentrations in the bantustans, peripheries, and squatter camps. Thus, certain major urban areas do not appear, including Ozizweni, Ezikhaweni, Esikhaweni, Kwa Msane, Wembezi, Ezakheni, Emondlo, Kayaletu, and Ga Luka. If Bushbuckridge is mentioned (a vast concentration of African population in an area of ex-bantustans), it is always under the denomination of a small mountain range that gives its name to a village, Bosbokrand.

From a post-settler society perspective, the post-Apartheid censuses aimed to consider all South African settlements as census places and the aggregation of all separate parts of cities as urban areas (figure 5). This evolution is part of a larger process aiming to build new inclusive local government dispensation (Cameron, 1999; Giraut, Maharaj, 2002; Ramutsindela, 2001; Sutcliffe, 2002; South African Cities Network 2004; Maharaj, Narsiah, 2005; Houssay-Holzschulch, Vacchiani-Marcuzzo, 2009) and to re-hierarchize places and communities from geographical representations of settlements using cartography, census data, toponymy and so forth. In short, it attempts to produce a new geography against social and political representations in a divided society as well as symbolic and social resistances and inertia.

4. The splitting of the apartheid cities into separate settlements (A) and the selective status of census places according to the area of the urban municipality (B). (Giraut, 2005) [CBD : Central Business District ; BZ : Buffer Zone]
Conclusion

The successive South African censuses, according to their related territorial engineering and ideologies, implement a changing hierarchy of place that is typical of a settler society and of its evolving representations of space and society. The fundamental distinction between the localities founded by people of European origin and the places where people of African origin were living resulted in a shadow South Africa that was made invisible in both the political sphere of local government and the official representation of the distribution of places. The dynamics of urbanization in non-European populations over time led to changes in official representations and the hierarchy of place, with a gradual and partial recognition of the indigenous communities within the highly segregative pattern of the apartheid urbanization. The subsequent end of the apartheid era has led to an inclusive official pattern of
settlements including African villages, compounds, townships and former border bantustan settlements. Over one century, the official census places and the pattern of population distribution have shifted from a settler society view of human settlements to a postcolonial society view including the space and places of the whole former subaltern part of the inherited colonial society.

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