

# Conflicting Rationalities: Implications for Planning Theory and Ethics

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**ABSTRACT** *The article argues that while certain recent planning theories have attempted to take account of social difference and multiculturalism, there is not yet sufficient recognition of just how deep difference can be, and how planners can frequently find themselves in situations characterized by conflicting rationalities. The article draws on a case of an attempted informal settlement upgrade in Cape Town, South Africa, to illustrate the gap between the notion of 'proper citizens' and 'proper living environments' espoused by the municipality, and the nature of the rationality guiding the actions of certain of the other parties involved. This understanding, it is suggested, has important implications for both planning theory and ethics.*

## Introduction

In January of 1998 an attempt by the Western Cape Provincial authority in South Africa and the then municipality of Cape Town to replace an informal settlement in Crossroads with formal, serviced houses, was brought to an abrupt halt by a group of women, calling themselves the Women's Power Group. The group staged a sit-in in the local administrative offices in Crossroads, demanding that the project be stopped. The sit-in lasted three months, and proved to be the flash point for a conflict which subsequently embroiled local organizations, residents, councillors and the municipality.

In June of 1998 the municipality set up a Commission of Enquiry to investigate these events (City of Cape Town, 1998). The 323-page report documents 44 pieces of oral evidence together with its conclusions and recommendations.<sup>1</sup> What is captured in this incident, and in the pages of the Commission report, is a direct clash of rationalities which, it is argued, is simply one instance of the kinds of clashes which take place with great regularity in the cities of Africa. Yet again, attempts by functionaries of government to extend the grid of formalized and regulated development over what is often termed the 'informal' or sometimes 'unruly' (or unrule-able?) (Pile *et al.*, 1999) part of the city, had foundered.

This article explores the various rationalities at work in this particular incident. Why was this effort by the authorities and planners to create a 'proper' living environment and a 'proper' community met with such resistance by people in Crossroads? What were the assumptions informing the development which were so clearly brought into question by subsequent events there?

These questions have wider implications. Contemporary planning theory continues to grapple with the tension between the acknowledgement of context-related diversity, and the desire to produce normative theoretical positions (relating to both procedure and

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product) which can be of generalized use to planners in practice (Watson, 2002a) as well as to those concerned with planning's institutional settings. The arguments made here are that first, current planning theories which attempt to respond to diversity, difference or multiculturalism are still unable to comprehend the very real clash of rationalities which so frequently occurs when plan or development project touches the lives and livelihoods of households and communities. The reality of fundamentally different worldviews and different value-systems is still often treated as superficial in planning theory, and the issue of how planners situate themselves ethically in such situations has not been given sufficient attention.

Second, it is argued that if planning theory is to develop in a way which is more helpful to planners who have to deal with diversity and conflict, then it needs to be grounded in a particular form of research. Current attempts to develop planning theory through 'readings' of various social theorists (be it Habermas or postmodern theorists) do not seem to be able to take us beyond further questionable generalizations. Planning research needs to return to the concrete, to the empirical and to case research, not as a mindless return to empiricism, but as a way of gaining a better understanding of the nature of difference, and generating ideas and propositions which can more adequately inform practice.

### **Creating 'Proper' Citizens and Communities**

First, it is necessary to examine what underlies the notion of a 'proper' community, because these ideas were clearly informing not only the state-initiated, physical project of house-building in the Crossroads case, but also the processes through which the project was being discussed and implemented. The sources for these ideas of a 'proper' community lie in part in South African government policy documents and in part in broader theories of development and planning.

The notion that poor people should be provided, by the state, with formal housing structures in planned and serviced areas forms the cornerstone of current South African national housing policy. In many areas, including that of Crossroads, this has been interpreted to mean that informal structures do not constitute acceptable housing, and have to be replaced. The desire on the part of governments almost everywhere to formalize informal, irregular or illegal settlement has a long history with its origins, as described by James Scott (1998, p. 4), lying in the early emergence of modern statecraft and its subsequent development into 'high-modernist ideology' aimed at 'the rational design of social order commensurate with the scientific understanding of natural laws'. These imperatives, in the first instance, shaped government action in Westernized societies but were applied as well, often with missionary zeal, in colonial and postcolonial territories where development and modernization came to mean the same thing. Ideals underlying this ideology have always been partly utopian (the creation of a better society and healthy, contented communities) but also partly bound up with the desire to administer, to control and to incorporate populations into municipal finance systems.

Implicit in this ideology are the assumptions that occupants of informal structures (usually assumed to be stable nuclear families) will accept the long-term, binding legal and financial obligations that accompany home ownership: adherence to various regulations regarding the use of the land and the conduct of the occupants (e.g. respecting noise and health standards), and the payment of regular rates and service charges to the municipal authority. Also implicit is the assumption that shack-dwellers will be prepared to commit themselves to a particular piece of land or territory which they will

come to regard as their permanent home. Recent thinking on housing policy in the developing world (UN-Habitat, 2002) ties the issue of shelter upgrade firmly to poverty reduction and sustainable urbanization, and argues particularly for the formalization of tenure systems: the link between these remains somewhat unclear.

The post-apartheid commitment to meeting basic housing needs in South Africa was extended significantly in the policy documents and legislation which accompanied the transformation of local government. The White Paper on local government (Ministry for Provincial Affairs and Constitutional Development, 1998) demands that municipalities become 'developmental' i.e. they work with citizens and groups within communities to find sustainable ways of meeting social and material needs. The White Paper explains that this assumes the establishment of democratic rule through elected councillors, that councillors should work with organs of civil society (seen as separate from the state), should foster community participation and (qualified<sup>2</sup>) consensus around development and should work to build up 'social capital' to find local solutions to problems.

These ideas about state, citizenship and participation are not unique to South Africa: they are firmly rooted in current Western political and social theory, from which planning theory also takes its cue. While South Africa's notion of developmental local government is strongly influenced by the international shift to New Public Management and entrepreneurial government, principles underlying the traditional, Weberian, model of the bureaucratic state still hold. What is involved in creating 'proper' communities is thus no longer just a technical and managerial task, it is also a moral and political task (Chipkin, 2003). A citizen is a person who exercises their individual democratic rights through established channels (democratically elected councillors, chosen by ballot, not self-proclaimed leaders) in a prescribed and lawful way (not through violence or corruption), and on the basis of support for a defined political programme (not personal support for an individual politician). Councillors and officials (assumed to be impartial public servants) are similarly bound by municipal codes of conduct which hold them to a set of ethics and the rule of law. They are required to acknowledge that public resources belong to the organization (not to individual public servants or representatives) and to accept that public duty, not private interests, provides overall motivation.

Current political theory claims a clear distinction between the state and what is termed 'civil society'. Earlier definitions of the concept, which saw civil society as a process by which society seeks to counteract the potential totalizing tendencies of the state (Allen, 1997), have given way to a focus on the actors responsible for such a process. This 'associational life' view of civil society is based on the assumptions that non-governmental organizations and autonomous societal groups are a significant part of civil society, and that they are distinct from the state and often in conflict with it. In normative terms, the fostering of a strong civil society is seen as essential for the building of democracy, and both aid and development agencies have been encouraged to focus their attention, in Africa in particular, on local social movements and non-governmental organizations as opposed to the state.

Planning theory, as well, has contributed to the conventional wisdom on the functioning of 'proper' communities, primarily through its ideas on decision-making processes in the context of urban and land development. Communicative action theory could be described as the current dominant approach in planning theory, although critiques of it have emerged (for example see Tewdwr-Jones & Allmendinger, 1998). In brief (Watson, 2002a), communicative action theory argues that planning decisions should be reached through collaborative processes involving all stakeholders, and conforming to particular rules which ensure that participation is fair, equal and empowering. Embedded in this

approach are the assumptions that community divisions can be overcome and consensus can be reached on planning issues; that collaborative processes involving primarily civil society-based groups can act to put pressure on the state to act more responsibly; and that collaboration can provide a learning environment and can serve to build social capital<sup>3</sup> within communities. These ideas in turn are highly compatible with that political theory which argues for more citizen-oriented and responsive government.

Significantly, certain planning theorists have attempted to move beyond the assumptions of universality contained in communicative action theory, which allows differences between actors to occur only at the level of speech or ideas, and which in turn can be overcome through the force of the better argument (Habermas, 1984). Healey (1992, p. 152) acknowledges that communicating groups may operate within different “systems of meaning”, which means that “we see things differently because words, phrases, expressions, objects, are interpreted differently according to our frame of reference”. However, the assumption remains that these differences can be overcome through debate in a consensus-seeking process.

Acknowledgement of diversity (and ‘multiculturalism’) is a central element in the work of Leonie Sandercock (1998a, 1998b, 2000). Her main point of departure is that citizenship is fragmented by identity, and that society is structured by culturally different groupings based on sexuality, ethnicity, gender or race. This diversity requires to be celebrated rather than repressed, and the claims of different groups need to be recognized and facilitated. The difference with Sandercock’s work is that she is concerned to build consensus between groups which affirms and valorizes difference rather than erases it, and which could take the form of resistance to the state. While this represents an important shift away from assumptions of universal citizenship, a belief that culturally different groups can reach consensus is present here as well.

These concepts and assumptions regarding the role and functioning of state, society and citizens thus define one set of rationalities which was at play in the case of the Crossroads housing project. They could be described as closely linked to ideas of modernity and progress shaped by a Western experience, as well as to normative ideas about state, citizenship and recognition of identity which have also largely emanated from that context. They help to define the notion of ‘proper’ citizens and communities which, at least at the level of rhetoric, drives the policies and actions of local authorities in South Africa and in other parts of Africa as well.<sup>4</sup> There is now a return to the case of Crossroads and the Women’s Power Group sit-in.

### **Crossroads: Conflicting Rationality?**

By adopting the name Women’s Power Group, the women (numbers varied between 50 and 300) who occupied the council offices in Cape Town in January 1998 were clearly attempting to establish a legitimate identity for themselves which was undeniably modern, perhaps even postmodern. In the South African context, where a policy of affirmative action has given particular legitimacy to the voice of organized black women, adopting a label of this kind was highly strategic.

Moreover, on the surface, they had legitimate cause for complaint. The houses, which were being built to replace their shacks, were only 25 m<sup>2</sup> in size, that is, smaller than houses which were built by the state in Crossroads in the dying years of apartheid. They also complained *inter alia* that no community facilities were being provided, and that the elected African National Congress (ANC) councillors for the area were corrupt, guilty of nepotism, and were not reporting back to their constituencies. Their other complaints

about the councillors, however, begin to hint at an alternative logic. The councillors, they claimed, were *Nkwenkwe*, that is, they had not been circumcised and therefore were not 'men'<sup>5</sup> and could not be leaders. Further, they originated from one particular area of the Eastern Cape<sup>6</sup> and thus represented only one part of the Crossroads community, those who also had roots in this area. These councillors should therefore be removed or 'sent away'.

The actual nature of the identity of the Women's Power Group becomes even more interesting as it is revealed in the Commission pages where their sources of support lie. First, it becomes apparent that they are directly and materially supported by the municipality's very own security guards, hired to prevent just such illegal use of the Council offices. These security guards, most of whom lived in the area, allegedly allowed the women to move in and out of the municipal offices at will, brought them food, and allowed them to sleep in their vans. The assumption of a division between state and community quickly comes into question.

Second, it is claimed by a number of informants that the formation of the women's group had been initiated<sup>7</sup> by certain warlords (also termed shack lords, traditionalists or tribal chiefs). These men had spearheaded the resistance of Crossroads to state bulldozers in the 1980s, but had later sided with the apartheid government against the militant *comrades* of the ANC. The Commission accepts that the primary source of income and power for these warlords has for many years been the informal settlements themselves, where they appropriated the role of the local authority and taxed residents for occupation rights, business rights and 'protection' in various forms. The replacement of shacks with formal houses thus very directly implied the supplanting of warlord power with municipal power, and was predictably a move the warlords wished to prevent.

The warlords, however, had their own sources of legitimacy: Mr Jeffrey Nongwe was the Western Cape chairman of CONTRALESA (Congress of Traditional Leaders of South Africa), the national organization of rural traditional leaders or chiefs, the status of which is recognized in the 1996 Constitution (chapter 12). Mr Johnson Ngxobongwana had moved out of Crossroads with his followers in 1990 and had set up a shack settlement in a nearby nature reserve. He was also, however, an elected provincial representative of the New National Party, previously the ruling National Party under the apartheid government. Both men were also members of WECUSA (Western Cape United Squatters Association), a civic organization set up in the 1980s to represent the shack settlements of Cape Town and resist their removal, and Nongwe was chair of this organization for a while. Networks here articulate pre-colonial (but persisting) sources of chieftain power with modern governmental and civic sources of power, as well as rural sources with urban ones. The concern of the Women's Group regarding circumcision of the Councillors and their place of birth, reflect a more rural and traditional rationality, although such positions are by no means confined to this arena and can be opportunistically used when the situation calls for it.

The Women's Power Group had support from certain political parties as well. They appeared to have strong links with the PAC (Pan African Congress), a small 'black-consciousness' political party with most of its support in the Eastern Cape, and their clothes and belongings were stored in the local PAC office. But there were also ANC members amongst the women, much to the horror of the ANC leaders who met with the women, and who asked these women to dissociate themselves from the sit-in. Moreover, one of the ANC party branches in the area was also allegedly trying to sabotage the housing development, even though it was being implemented via an ANC controlled local authority, as the branch leaders were 'bitter' about not being elected as councillors.

Political loyalties thus also become blurred. Probably the most unexpected support came, allegedly, from PAGAD (People Against Gangs and Drugs), a Moslem fundamentalist group based in the coloured townships of the Cape Flats, implicated in numerous acts of public violence and assassinations in Cape Town. They were seen to be bringing food to the women, their faces covered by the characteristic checked cloths. Networks, it appears, can span cultural difference as well if it serves particular purposes.

But what of the tactics and strategies adopted by the women's group? To sustain a sit-in for months on end demanded capacity and commitment. The women coped with this by taking on shifts, and those who met with the women reported a more or less constant number of people, but continually changing faces. The size of support for this resistance may thus have been much larger than imagined. Many of the women had left their empty shacks standing on the land where the formal housing development was to take place. They probably knew that it would require a court order for their formal removal, and in fact this was to hold up the project for several months.

Other tactics were more violent. A Mr Ndinisa of the RDP Forum<sup>8</sup> as well as councillor Gwayi were held hostage by the women during the sit-in, and the women allegedly became violent and abusive when council officials and the mayor attempted to meet with them. Councillor Elese claims he was attacked on 24 April by eight heavily armed men with links to the PAC, Contralesa and the Women's Power Group, and his car was riddled with bullet holes. These groups, it was claimed, also had links to the South African Defence Force and stolen military weapons were used for such attacks.

But if the Women's Power Group were not conducting themselves as 'proper' citizens, the councillors, Messrs Gwayi and Elese, were deviating even further from this norm. Again, their overt claims appeared legitimate: they wished to see the housing project go ahead so that Crossroads residents would be better housed, and so that they could be regarded as effective councillors, worthy of re-election. Here, however, they were in the frontline of the war of municipal power with warlord power, and this required them to draw on networks and sources of support which lay well beyond those provided by their position as elected representatives.

Armed support came from the local taxi mafia (the Big Eight), and from what one informant termed as 'gangsters from Gauteng'.<sup>9</sup> The weapons and vehicles of the taxi mafia were, allegedly, used to threaten opponents and carry out assassinations. Here councillor networks with the police were useful, and they were usually able to secure quick bail and release for those arrested for such crimes. Councillor Gwayi himself had been charged with burning houses and shooting and with two murders, but he also appeared to have secured bail easily.

Councillors had also managed to establish networks with the legitimate civic associations in the area. Control of the RDP Forum was important as it was a channel for state resources. The councillors and RDP executive members sat on the project committee which allocated sites in Phase 4 of the Crossroads development (reportedly to friends and family), and had become involved in appointments to council posts and in the hiring of certain construction companies. Councillor Elese's brother was chair of the RDP forum and other RDP executive members were from the town of Ugie in the Eastern Cape and therefore would have had kinship links with Elese. Hence the accusations of nepotism and corruption by the Women's Group. Again, the notion of civil society as separate from the state, and as the source of democracy able to restrain the state, is bought into question.

The sit-in was brought to a close in mid-April when six of the women were arrested, and the rest left voluntarily. Their shacks, which had been stalling the formal housing

project, were burnt down in September, allegedly by Councillor Elese himself, assisted by municipality security staff. None of this prevented the re-election of Elese in 2000 nor, it appears, has his style of leadership changed: in April of 2002 he reportedly used a firearm at a meeting called to discuss a further housing development in Crossroads, leaving one person dead and four injured (*Cape Times*, 22 May 2002)!

### **Beyond Speech-level Misunderstandings**

The Crossroads story, which it is suggested is far from unique in the cities of Africa, is telling us that a vast gap exists between the notion of 'proper' communities held by most planners and administrators (grounded in the rationality of Western modernity and development), and the rationality which informs the strategies and tactics of those who are attempting to survive, materially and politically, in the harsh environment of Africa's cities.

Chabal & Deloz (1999) argue that it is a mistake to view Africa as a case of failed development; rather it is embracing modernity in a way which is highly particular to the economy and culture of the context.<sup>10</sup> The result is a fusion of the institutions and practices of Western modernity with local ways of coping in a situation of rapid change and economic crisis. In similar vein, the post-development literature is now pointing to ways in which planning and development programmes are 'absorbed' selectively by target communities, and are mutated within local traditions and ways of doing things, giving rise to various combinations of what planners and urban managers regard as 'proper', and what communities might regard as more or less useful (see Arce & Long, 2000). The term 'indigenous modernities' has been used to describe ways in which "development packages are resisted, embraced, reshaped or accommodated depending on the specific content and context" (Robins, 2003, p. 1). These writers are asking the question: how do people actually respond when confronted with attempts to impose particular forms of modernity; especially programmes which impose change in the use and control of territory, often accompanied by the destruction of social networks and forms of survival.

What we need to understand about modernity in the African context, Chabal & Deloz (1999, p. 148) argue, is that politics cannot be separated from socio-cultural considerations which govern everyday life. There is constant and dynamic interpretation of the different spheres of human experience, from the political to the religious. What this gives rise to are ways of operating in relation to the state and economy that are different, but nonetheless highly rational. They can only be defined as irrational when an attempt is made to hold them up against models of Western modernity which claim a monopoly on rationality.

Thus the concept of a state clearly separated from civil society does not hold in many parts of Africa.<sup>11</sup> Weak institutionalization of the state under colonialism has allowed the continuation of patrimonial forms of power and the informalization of politics, both of which have been reinforced by the impact of structural adjustment policies on African governments. There are therefore strong elements of vertical political organization via patron-client networks, linked to social and kinship networks, which blur the state-civil society divide (Chabal & Deloz, 1999; De Boeck, 1996). In situations of extreme poverty, access to state power and resources offers an important economic opportunity and it is informally expected of political leaders that they will spread the benefits of their position in return for political support and votes. Politics is therefore highly personalized and is socially structured.

In the Crossroads case patrimonialism allowed the ANC councillors to (allegedly) offer residential plots and positions on the RDP Forum to kin from their rural hometown of Ugie; and the warlords, one of whom held formal political office in the Provincial Parliament, were able to mobilize the women of Crossroads (who undoubtedly expected benefit of some kind) to protect their source of informal and illegal income. The call by the Women's Power Group for the councillors to be 'sent away' may well have been an indication that they were excluded from the relations of reciprocity established by the councillors.

The concept of identity in Africa also takes on very different form from what is sometimes described as a highly individualized 'life-style' politics in the West, and is far more likely to be grounded in material issues and the need for survival (Mohan, 1997). Thus identity in Africa is often a product of hybridization, fusion and cultural innovation. It is frequently self-generated and self-constructed, sometimes combining a stress on ethnic identity or 'retribalization', with global identities (De Boeck, 1996). Chabal & Deloz (1999, p. 51) point to the phenomenon of the mobile phone-wielding businessmen who nonetheless keep in touch with the village spirits, and who interpret Rambo from the memory of their initiation ceremonies. The fusion of identities within the Women's Power Group who claimed, despite this title, to want circumcised leaders with traditional (male) authority, is a case in point. It would be simplistic to suggest that what we have here is a rural, traditional rationality confronting a modern urban one, although this is how it appears on the surface. Operationalizing particular networks requires the (opportunistic) foregrounding of particular values and belief systems, which may change under different circumstances.

The project in Crossroads of replacing informal shacks with formal structures in a planned and serviced township also reveals a gap between planners' assumptions and reality. In resource-poor situations, marginalization in all its forms requires that individuals operate within and through a dense web of personal networks, or sets of reciprocal relationships. The phenomenon of spatially 'stretched' households (Spiegel *et al.*, 1996) and kinship networks which allows access to resources in varying urban, peri-urban and rural locations, as opportunity arises, has been well documented in Africa. Importantly, maintaining 'stretched' households or kinship networks produces frequent movement between urban and rural bases. Marginal economic and political opportunities, as they arise in different locales, require physical presence and hence movement. The population of Africa is highly mobile, ever shifting, ever searching for meagre sources of survival; or alternatively moving to escape warfare, persecution or natural disaster. There may well be emotional ties to a piece of land somewhere—called, perhaps, home. But for many of the poor in urban areas, there may be little commitment to a particular place or territory. Such commitment comes with economic progress, and with the ability to loosen relational ties and invest in land and structure rather than in maintaining social networks. Most urban projects assume commitment to a particular piece of land or territory and a continuity of presence, but it cannot be assumed that individuals or households will meet the requirements of 'proper' community members, investing in their land or home, contributing to rates and service charges, helping to build social capital and local democracy when survival demands frequent movement.

Planning theories which attempt to recognize social difference and multiculturalism represent an important advance. But in the situation described here, the clash of rationalities, or the differences in world-view between the various parties involved, is so great that it is difficult to believe that any amount of discussion or conflict resolution could overcome the divide and achieve consensus: differences go far beyond speech-

level misunderstandings or an unwillingness to see the others' point of view. It is also difficult to imagine (partly because this is an area on which so little research has been done) what institutional arrangements, or what systems of governance, might cope with such schisms. Even the City of Cape Town Commission of Enquiry, which was exposed in full to the complexities of the Crossroads situation, seemed unable to break from the bounds of their dominating rationality: their final recommendations centred on better communication, mediation, more consultation and adherence to the principles of democratic government (City of Cape Town, 1998). While these are certainly ideals worth striving for, they nonetheless ignore the very real material base of conflicts such as these.

Seen from a Western perspective, the Crossroads events may appear as an extreme case of conflict, dysfunctionality or social breakdown, and could be written off as a 'Third World' problem. But it may also be the case that social and cultural difference within the seemingly more homogenous societies of the West runs far deeper than planners and current planning theory can accommodate. Communicative action theory has for some time been criticized on the grounds that it fails to recognize the operation of power (Flyvbjerg, 1998a; Huxley, 2000; Huxley & Yiftachel, 2000) within consensus-seeking processes, and the issue of power remains problematic in multicultural positions as well. Other writers (e.g. Abram, 2000; Neuman, 2000) have pointed to the great difficulty or impossibility of achieving consensus around planning issues however carefully formulated the process: differences can be underestimated and planners can assume a shared rationality where it does not exist. It may also be, that in the post-September 11 and Iraq war era, conflicting rationalities will make themselves felt with an intensity not experienced before, particularly in the larger and more culturally and materially diverse cities of the West.

It would appear that there is an urgent need for planning theorists to think further on the issue of planning in a context of conflicting rationalities, recognizing the operation of power as it both shapes and maintains them. There is also a need to find ways of incorporating this understanding into planning education and professional development, in all parts of the world, allowing learners to challenge the normative value systems that are so often routinized in planning practices. Given these needs, there are two issues which require further thought: first, the methods through which scholars develop planning theory, and the nature of theory itself and second the problem of planning ethics. The final section of the article turns to these.

### **Planning Theory and Ethics**

It has been argued elsewhere (Watson, 2002b) that what is sometimes termed 'the practice movement' in planning (writings about the activities and practices of planners as they undertake their planning tasks) offers important advantages for the development of planning theory. This 'turn' has occurred in the context of a growing critique of that social theory which attempts to emulate theory in the natural sciences: the production of generalized theory which aims to be context-independent and predictive (Flyvbjerg, 2001). It also recognizes the unsatisfactory nature of more recent planning theory in which "... planning is still portrayed as an unproblematic global activity, adhering to a similar logic of communicative rationality wherever it is found" (Huxley & Yiftachel, 2000, p. 336).

Recognition that contexts differ, and that the rationalities of Western modernity and capitalism apply in highly varied forms between (and within!) different parts of the world, demands a return to the concrete, to context and to case research as a way of

taking forward planning theory—if we accept that one primary function of planning theory is to assist planning practice. The central thrust of this article has been that planners and other agents of intervention continue to make assumptions about the values, beliefs, or rationalities of those for (or with) whom they plan, which frequently do not hold. The only way to counter this is to explore, in context, examples of planning intervention which illustrate the various rationalities at play and how they interact with each other in a planning or development process.

This does not necessarily imply a mindless empiricism. Implicitly or explicitly we draw on theoretical ‘lenses’ (Harris, 2000), often borrowed from other disciplines, to frame our understanding of particular situations. Yiftachel & Huxley (2000, p. 911), in calling for planning theoreticians and practitioners to critically examine planning rather than to search for ‘a’ planning theory, note that planners tend to use elements from a variety of epistemological approaches and that this creates a healthy diversity in the field. A return to context also does not imply an abandoning of theory, or the production of potentially generalizable statements about planning. It is generally accepted in case research methodology (Yin, 1994, p. 10) that case studies are generalizable to theoretical propositions (not to populations or universes) and yield propositions which can be tested further in other cases.

However, the form of case research that is theoretically and pedagogically useful is important. Much practice movement writing has adhered to a strongly subject-centred view of planning (Gualini, 2001), and as a consequence “the primary source of our knowledge of planning is the discursive output of planners; their spoken and written words in their conversations, reports and plans” (Fischler, 2000, p. 358). If writings on planning are to contribute to our personal mental repertoire of unique cases, which we can use as an informant for future action, then they need to go beyond this. The ‘institutional turn’ in planning theory (see Gualini, 2001; Healey, 1999) understands planning as a set of practices embedded in an institutional field, and those using a Foucauldian ‘lens’ see planning not just as interpersonal communication but as a practice of government (Fischler, 2000; Flyvbjerg, 1998b). Case writing also needs to be contextualized in time and place, be rich in situational understanding, and be transparent about the identities and values of those involved (Flyvbjerg, 2001; Watson, 2002b).

Planning in a context of conflicting and competing rationalities also raises important questions about ethics, in relation to both researchers and practitioners. Planning is fundamentally an ethical activity as it raises questions about what should be done, for whom and by whom, and with what benefits or losses. But in a situation of competing rationalities critical questions are raised about the universality of ethics and whose ethics should prevail. Thinking on this issue has not progressed far and this article does no more than indicate what may be fruitful lines of enquiry.

Planners frequently operate within the framework of unified ethical positions such as utilitarianism, Rawlsian contract theory, Habermasian reasoning and consensus, or various forms of environmentalism. But a number of writers have attempted to probe the notion of universal ethics, and how we could regard the ethical frameworks of others, which may be different from our own. Some of these ideas have been inspired by a postmodern concern with the recognition of difference and by related feminist enquiry. Thus Haraway (1991, p. 191) proposes a doctrine of ‘embodied objectivity’ which involves ‘seeing’ from the perspective of the ‘subjugated’, not because people who are oppressed are ‘innocent’ but because “in principle they are least likely to allow denial of the critical and interpretative core of all knowledge ... subjugated standpoints are preferred because they seem to promise more adequate, sustained, objective, trans-

forming accounts of the world" (in Hall, 2003). Within the planning field Campbell (2002) has argued that because planning problems are inherently 'situated' (and contested) we need to find an appropriate basis for ethical judgement in planning based on a relational understanding of society which recognizes both difference and the common good. Planning should not, therefore, be about the imposition of fixed values, but rather about "situated judgement with and for others ... in just institutions" (Campbell, 2002, p. 282). Flyvbjerg (2001) draws on Foucault's concept of 'situational ethics', rejecting both a foundational and relativistic idea of norms, and accepting instead norms that are contextually grounded. This involves discovering the common view among a specific reference group to which the researchers refer.

A return to the Crossroads case, and to Africa, demonstrates both that contextually grounded norms exist and that the relativist position of 'anything goes' can (theoretically) be avoided. The Crossroads incident highlighted what is fairly commonplace in Africa: the use by politicians of their public position to enrich themselves, and then to distribute the benefits (in the form of plots of land, building contracts, and positions on influential committees) as reward to their supporters or kin. This violates entirely the universalist ethical positions referred to above, within which such practices would be termed corruption. Chabal & Deloz (1999), however, argue that in a context of weak institutionalization and a political system which does not distinguish sharply between the individual and the community, these practices of patronage, or clientelistic reciprocity, are accepted. Hence the frequent re-election of what some may regard as corrupt dictators in Africa, a phenomenon which the authors refer to as 'recycling elites'. However, where the system of reciprocity breaks down, and the benefits of political patronage fail to be redistributed, then political support ceases and pressure mounts for leadership removal. The system is therefore self-correcting, to a degree. What is also clear in the context of Africa, these authors argue, is that while patrimonialism is accepted, the violence which is also often part of political struggles is not. Murder, rape and criminality, although highly prevalent, are no more acceptable to ordinary women and men in Africa than they are in any other part of the world: certain values thus remain universal.

The possibility of 'embodied objectivity' (Haraway), 'situated judgement' (Campbell), or 'situational ethics' (Foucault) in planning clearly needs development, as it is a particularly thorny one for planners practising in contexts of clashing rationalities.

## Conclusion

This article argues that planning theories which have attempted to recognize difference and multiculturalism represent an important advance over previous universalized positions, but that they too contain universal assumptions which do not hold in many parts of the world. It would appear that there is not yet sufficient recognition (in the world of planning theorists at least) of just how deep difference can be, and how often planners find themselves facing situations of fundamentally different and conflicting rationalities. The Crossroads case used here highlights these conflicts, but they are symptomatic of the kinds of conflicts to be found in many parts of the world, particularly where the 'reach' of Western modernity is less even. It may also be the case that even within what is generally known as the West, societies are less homogenous than many planning theorists would have it, and that the current creation of new global political alignments may work to deepen existing social divisions. There seems to be an urgent case, therefore, for thinking about planning from both a critical analytical and

normative perspective, which is grounded in a deep understanding of contextual difference, but which also considers what we can learn from practice about both the conduct of planners and planning's institutionalized settings.

## Notes

1. On 19 June 1998 the Cape Town City Manager announced the Executive Committee of Cape Town's decision to appoint an independent and impartial commission of enquiry to investigate incidents of conflict in Crossroads. Mr Essa Moosa, Rev Mlamli Mfenyana and Ms Geraldine Coy were appointed as Hearing Officers. Their Terms of Reference were to investigate the nature of allegations being made against councillors, what substance there was to these allegations, causes of conflict and what mechanisms may be used to counter future conflict. A Communications Campaign was mounted to inform people in the area of the Hearings (posters were placed at schools, libraries, clinics, shopping centres and on poles; pamphlets were delivered to all houses in the area; there were three television broadcasts and radio and press announcements). People were invited to make verbal or written submissions. Fifteen public hearings were held and oral evidence from 44 parties was electronically recorded and transcribed. Three hearings were held in camera due to the sensitive nature of the evidence. Submissions were not made under oath, but parties were asked to state that they spoke the truth. Nine parties submitted written evidence, in the form of affidavits. The final report of the Commission (City of Cape Town, 1998) was made available for public purchase. Since it was not the intention of the Commission to prove guilt, all claims and accusations quoted in the final report and used in this article have been described as 'alleged'.
2. Ministry for Provincial Affairs and Constitutional Development (1998: 20): "... the participatory process should not become an obstacle to development ..."
3. Consensus-seeking processes can have an added benefit in that the shared understanding, mutual trust and 'identity-creation' which are built up, linger on as new 'cultural resources' or 'cultural capital' (Healey, 1999, p. 114).
4. Where these notions are less well entrenched within government (particularly in countries on the continent other than South Africa) they are very firmly entrenched in the programmes of aid and development agencies and NGOs.
5. African men undergo initiation rites in their mid-teens, which involves circumcision. Only then, according to tradition, can they call themselves men.
6. The Eastern Cape is some 1000 km from Cape Town and contains areas previously designated as 'homelands' or 'bantustans' under apartheid: land set aside as labour reserves for African occupation and administration under the principle of 'separate development'.
7. Quite what the returns were for the women who involved themselves in this sit-in were not clear.
8. RDP (Reconstruction and Development Programme) Forums are community-based organizations, functioning outside of government and in the poorer areas of South Africa. They were initiated by the new government shortly after 1994 as structures which would encourage grassroots participation in development projects and would assist in channelling public funding to poorer areas.
9. The Gauteng Province contains Johannesburg and is South Africa's largest concentration of economic activity and population.
10. The same would apply, they suggest, to forms of modernity in Asian countries and China.
11. Chabal & Daloz confine their arguments to Sub-Saharan Africa, and also exclude South Africa which they regard as having embraced Western modernity more thoroughly. But as the Crossroads case illustrates, this embrace is highly uneven within the country as a whole.

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