

<running head>Everyday Resistance against White Supremacy

Everyday Resistance against White Supremacy: Walking and Cycling while Black in Springs, South Africa (1950s–1970s)

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Abstract

This article explores why white supremacists regard self-directed mobility by people of color as threatening by examining a controversy that unfolded in a mining town called Springs during the apartheid era in South Africa. Drawing on archives, oral histories, and testimonies, it shows how white residents of Selcourt and Selection Park, along with their allies in the town council, prevented Black workers from walking and cycling through the suburbs. Infrastructure and social disciplinary institutions proved effective in forcing Black workers to largely comply. It argues that the white supremacists' disciplinary imperative against the workers arose directly from the characteristics of their mode of mobility. In their open embodiment, free from the confines of mechanized transport, and slow speeds, the workers engaged in a sustained refusal of spatial segregation. The article highlights how racial difference as an analytical category sheds light on mobility control within regimes of white supremacy.

Keywords: racialized mobility, white supremacy, cycling, walking, apartheid, South Africa

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Introduction

In a 2007 article, Cotton Seiler remarked on the “paucity of scholarly work specifically treating race and mobility.”¹ More recently, in a review of publications about urban mobility in *Technology and Culture*, Peter Norton argues that “major racial aspects of mobility and transport retain a low profile.”² While there has been growing attention, such publications mainly concern public transportation in an American context.³ As Gordon Pirie notes, “far less energy has been given to scrutinizing and understanding racialized mobilities” in South Africa “than to analyzing other expressions of racialism.”⁴ The few studies examining the intersections of race and mobility in South Africa focus on public transport, such as buses and trains.⁵ This focus is not surprising given the reliance of people of color on mass transit prior to democracy. Nevertheless, people of color did use private modes of transport as well; they drove cars, rode bicycles, and walked.⁶ Seiler

¹ Seiler, “The Significance of Race to Transport History,” 309.

² Norton, “Urban Transport and Mobility in *Technology and Culture*,” 1200–1201.

³ Zylstra, “Whiteness, Freedom, and Technology”; Lüthi, ““You Don’t Have to Ride Jim Crow.””

⁴ Pirie, “Colours, Compartments and Corridors,” 40.

⁵ Tom Lodge, “‘We Are Being Punished Because We Are Poor’: The Bus Boycotts of Evaton and Alexandra, 1955–1957” (working paper, March 1979), available at

<http://wiredspace.wits.ac.za/handle/10539/9060>; Dauskardt, “Local State, Segregation and Transport Provision”; McCarthy and Swilling, “The Apartheid City and the Politics of Bus Transportation”; Pirie, “Racial Segregation on Johannesburg Trams”; Pirie, “Rolling Segregation into Apartheid.”

⁶ Witulski, “Black Commuters in South Africa”; Khosa, “Transport and Popular Struggles in South Africa.”

argues that regimes of white supremacy sought to police such “self-directed mobility” because it “signifie[d] freedom and self-transformation.”⁷

During certain periods, private modes of mobility also held a special status for white supremacists; these modes connoted wealth and modernity, which white supremacists saw as signifying their superiority over people of color, and so they took action to control these modes, either limiting their use by Black people or preventing it altogether by making it difficult for Black people to acquire driver and bicycle licenses, mounting smear campaigns in the press, banning walking on sidewalks, and excluding Black people from membership in cycling clubs.⁸ But even in periods when such locomotion did not hold symbolic status for white supremacists, self-directed mobility remained a threat. This article explores why by examining a controversy that began in the mid-1950s and persisted through the early 1970s in a small town called Springs in apartheid South Africa. Following the creation of a segregated residential area for Black Africans called KwaThema, the mobility of its residents began to worry white supremacists, particularly their movement on foot and bicycle from KwaThema through affluent white neighborhoods on their way to work in an industrial area called Nuffield. Despite the fact that cycling, walking, and driving had by then become common practices for all groups, racist residents of Selcourt and Selection Park asked the town council to stop workers from cycling and walking through their neighborhoods. The town council launched an investigation and then imposed controls.⁹ Workers largely complied with

⁷ Seiler, “The Significance of Race,” 308.

⁸ Cardon, “Cycling on the Color Line”; Morgan, “Driving, Cycling and Identity in Johannesburg”; Franz, ““The Open Road.””

⁹ Morgan, “Driving, Cycling and Identity.” Descriptions of archival and newspaper records, represent perspectives of the white community, while (although the archival resources are poor in their organization and maintenance) providing some insights into Black commuters’ mobility. Eight

the control efforts, which used various socio-technical infrastructures, and avoided Selcourt and Selection Park. However, there were instances of micro-resistance, such as when workers temporarily left the mandated bicycle lanes to ride on the main road along the routes they were forced to take.

Drawing on findings that indicate that cycling and walking are the modes of transport that best facilitate exposure to diversity, this article argues that Black workers engaged in everyday resistance to spatial segregation by being physically present and moving slowly through the neighborhoods, and that it was this overt challenge to apartheid that provoked white fears.¹⁰ Contributing to the literature on the social construction of technology, and specifically to scholarship on the control of mobility, this study joins others that have shown how power dynamics between social groups, as reflected in class and gender differences, have been central to changes in such control.¹¹ To this literature, it adds race as a key analytical category that can shed light on mobility control within regimes of white supremacy.

in-depth interviews with workers who cycled and walked to work between the 1950s and 1970s, combined with family histories, serve as a counterpoint to understand responses to the control of their mobility that are largely absent from official records.

¹⁰ Te Brömmelstroet et al., “Travelling Together Alone and Alone Together.”

¹¹ Bek, *No Bicycle, No Bus, No Job*; Bijker, “Technology, Social Construction of”; Bonham and Cox, “The Disruptive Traveller?”; Errázuriz, “When Walking Became Serious”; Hannam, “Gendered Automobilities”; Nicholson and Sheller, “Race and the Politics of Mobility”; Norton, *Fighting Traffic*; Seiler, “Significance of Race”; Oldenziel and Albert de la Bruhèze, “Contested Spaces.”

Creating a Controversy

Springs is a town 50 kilometers east of Johannesburg, South Africa. It was established in the late nineteenth century when a rich seam of coal was discovered in the area. The town's mining base was consolidated with the subsequent discovery of gold, but concerns that mineral resources could not sustain the economy led the town council in the 1930s to recruit local and international companies to create a manufacturing sector. Over the next decade, companies began to set up shop, producing steel, glass, bicycles, and other products.¹²

Springs reflected broader patterns in South African history. While its economic expansion attracted numerous entrepreneurs and workers from home and abroad, resulting in a multicultural population at all class levels, social class distinctions that intersected with rising racial sensibilities emerged early on and materialized physically in residential segregation. In 1924, for example, the town council established a separate residential area called Payneville, whose residents the authorities' racial classifications referred to as Black African, Indian, Colored, and Chinese. Payneville was divided into two sections, one for Chinese and Indians and the other for Africans and Coloreds.¹³

Twenty years later, from the perspective of segregationists, the creation of Payneville near downtown and the white suburbs would prove to have been a "mistake." In the 1940s, Payneville's population swelled well beyond its capacity to accommodate residents owing to a gold mining boom and the establishment and expansion of a manufacturing industry that brought an influx of workers to Springs.¹⁴ While many miners lived in barracks-style quarters on mine property, others crowded into Payneville. Some rented backyard dwellings in the "white" suburbs, while others

¹² Nieftagodien, "The Making of Apartheid in Springs"; Springs Municipality, *Springs*.

¹³ Nieftagodien, "Making of Apartheid," 100.

¹⁴ Nieftagodien, "Making of Apartheid," 100.

squatted on farm land near town. Employers in the booming economy worried that the housing shortage would drive away needed workers. White residents, however, feared that the growing Black population would “overwhelm” them, especially given Payneville’s proximity to downtown and the white suburbs and the fact that they were vastly outnumbered. As social historian Mohamed Nieftagodien notes, in 1950 “whites constituted about thirty percent and Africans close to seventy percent of the total population.”¹⁵ Whites successfully lobbied the local council to intervene; the council considered various solutions, including building new housing near the new Nuffield industrial estate. Eventually, with the cooperation of the mining companies and the national government, a consensus was reached to build a residential area for Black Africans called KwaThema about 7.5 kilometers directly west of Nuffield (figure 3).¹⁶

Construction of KwaThema started in December 1951, and residents began moving in by early June the following year.¹⁷ While the original plan was for KwaThema to house about seventy-five hundred people, by 1954 nearly twice that number were living there. Then, in 1954 the town council adopted formal plans to evict all Black Africans from Payneville Township and relocate them to KwaThema. Such forced removals, along with the voluntary relocation of a number of people seeking better living conditions, led to KwaThema’s population growing from 13,894 in 1954 to 34,838 in 1958. By 1960, it had grown to 37,000.¹⁸ KwaThema was designated as a “dormitory” settlement, so residents traveled elsewhere to work. In this way, it was no different

¹⁵ Nieftagodien, “Making of Apartheid,” 98.

¹⁶ Nieftagodien, “Making of Apartheid,” 104–15.

¹⁷ Roux, “Designing KwaThema,” 1; “Operation ‘Move’: First Family Installed at KwaThema,” SMRL.

¹⁸ Calderwood, “An Investigation into the Planning of Urban Native Housing in South Africa,” 121; Nieftagodien, “The Making of Apartheid in Springs,” 8, 9, 18.

from other suburbs in Springs. The planners envisioned “pedestrian access and a bus service” to get to Nuffield.¹⁹

Planners did not anticipate or initially accommodate bicycle commuting, but it became an important mode of transport. According to the interviewees, it was mainly men who used bicycles. Some of the male interviewees’ comments about women’s inability to ride bicycles suggest that women may have been reluctant to use them in order to not to experience social stigma or harassment from men. Despite the interviewees’ beliefs, some women did use them for their commute, including midwives on their rounds and domestic workers in the white suburbs who were given access to bicycles purchased by their employers. Those men and women who chose to cycle to work said they did so in part because it was cheaper and faster than riding the city buses.²⁰ While research shows that climate characterized by rain and cooler temperatures can discourage commuting by bicycle, Springs has a subtropical climate (brief but intense afternoon thundershowers in the summer months, while temperatures tend to remain mild in the winter) that facilitates it. So does its flat terrain.²¹ Cycling to and from work was a viable option for people of color not only because of the climate and geography; there was also a well-established bicycle manufacturing company in Springs.

The authorities did not design KwaThema with cycling in mind, but rather planned for residents to use buses or walk. However, the buses for KwaThema residents were “running to capacity during peak periods,” while the “fleet available to the European public” was not (this fleet

¹⁹ Calderwood, “Investigation into the Planning,” 121.

²⁰ Hadebe interview; Nhlapo, interview; Maphleba, interview; Mgidi, interview; Msiza, interview.

²¹ Heinen, Van Wee, and Maat, “Commuting by Bicycle”; Mendiante et al., “Cycling in Sub-Saharan African Cities”; Jury and Bhawoodien, “Cold Winters over the South African Highveld”; Mason and Jury, “Climatic Variability and Change over Southern Africa.”

had thirty-six buses, but only thirty of these were “employed [on a] fulltime [basis]”).²² Representatives of the group established to represent the interests of KwaThema residents frequently complained to the town council about limited bus schedules, long walks to bus stops, and an insufficient number of buses.²³ In 1962, at the request of the KwaThema residents’ representative group, the town council agreed to allocate two buses intended for the white population of Springs to ferry Black workers to and from work, but this was still not enough, and a number of workers in KwaThema who had initially used the bus to commute to work switched to bicycles. After switching, one interviewee also realized that her commute was shorter (by about 7 kilometers) and also more direct than the bus route.²⁴ The bus trip was about 20 kilometers because there was no direct west-east corridor from KwaThema to Nuffield. Instead, the bus would have to travel north from KwaThema and then take a road that had become popularly known as “Death Road” owing to the high number of deaths from collisions between Black cyclists and motor vehicles.²⁵ The bus would then head east, stopping in Payneville Township, among other places, before heading south to Nuffield. The pragmatic choices made by Black Africans in response to available transport options would inadvertently trigger conflict.

²² Springs Town Council, “Transfer of Buses to Non-European Services,” July 20, 1962, MSP 2/1/4/381, NASA.

²³ KwaThema Advisory Board, meeting minutes, October 13, 1964, July 15, 1965, and March 10, 1966, MSP 2/1/4/380, 120/5/16, NASA.

²⁴ Nhlapo, interview.

²⁵ “‘Death Road’: New Steps Planned,” *Rand Daily Mail*, August 1, 1956.

The Onset of Conflict

The cost- and time-saving decisions by Black residents of KwaThema to cycle to work resulted in heavy bicycle traffic in and out of the settlement. White motorists found the bicycle traffic annoying, and at times they expressed their irritation with brutal violence. In July 1956, for example, a newspaper reported that three men cycling home to KwaThema on “Death Road” in the evening were stoned by white men passing by in a car. One of the men died in an ambulance on the way to the hospital. A similar incident reportedly occurred the following morning, resulting in the death of another Black worker.²⁶

To address white motorists’ concerns about bicycle traffic from KwaThema north and northeast to an industrial area called New Era and the town center, respectively, the municipality built off-street bicycle lanes adjacent to existing roads (including “Death Road”; figure 1), a common community solution.²⁷ About three decades earlier, bicycle commuters from Payneville had been diverted off the road into downtown Springs by fenced cycle lanes. A journalist describing these tracks noted that “native [*sic*] cyclists, when leaving the main gate at Payneville, must enter the fenced cycle path and, they will have no means of leaving it until the path at entrance to Springs.”²⁸

<Insert figure 1 about here>

²⁶ “Two Natives Stoned to Death on Reef,” *Rand Daily Mail*, July 13, 1956.

²⁷ J. Burrus, “Proclamation of Widening of Springs West Road,” March 8, 1954, MSP T7/1, NASA; J. Van Bierk, “Proclamation of Widening of Springs West Road for Purposes of a Cycle Track: Farm Rietfontein No. 128—I.R. District Springs,” October 6, 1961, MSP T7/1, NASA; Springs Town Council, “West Springs Road—Cycle Track,” November 19, 1953, MSP 53/17, NASA.

²⁸ “Springs-Nigel Road Death Trap,” *Springs and Brakpan Advertiser*, September 8, 1939, 30 SMRL.

These bicycle tracks helped reduce conflicts between cyclists and motorists on roads running north and northeast, but not on roads running due east to the Nuffield industrial area (see figure 3). In the early 1960s, angry residents of the Selcourt and Selection Park suburbs complained to the town council about workers traveling through their suburbs to and from work.²⁹ The town clerk noted that “this practice is considered undesirable from the point of view of residents of Selcourt as well as constituting a traffic hazard in the built-up area.”³⁰ One newspaper reported that “residents of the fashionable suburb have complained that Africans were using the suburb as a shortcut to the factories and making a nuisance of themselves.”³¹ Another article said that the workers were not only noisy but also “a nuisance on the [r]oads.”³² A survey conducted by a company whose property the workers used for part of their commute found that “over three days in December 1962 . . . an average of nearly 1,000 cyclists plus numerous pedestrians and others” used a particular track “between the hours of 4 and 8 pm.”³³ In 1964, town officials reported findings of their own surveys of eastbound traffic from KwaThema. They found that a total of 3,233 people left and returned to KwaThema on an average day. Of these, the majority traveled by bus (1,680). A small proportion walked (321), while 1,232 used “other transport,” which they did not specify but

²⁹ “‘Black Road’ Route: Local Opinion Divided,” *Springs and Brakpan Advertiser*, September 21, 1962, SMRL.

³⁰ J. L. Van der Walt, “Bantu Traffic between Kwa-Thema Township and Nuffield Industrial Township, Springs,” April 1, 1964, MSP 53/17, NASA.

³¹ “None,” *Rand Daily Mail*, September 20, 1963, 2.

³² “Reef Africans May Get Luxury Monorail,” *Rand Daily Mail*, September 18, 1963, 3.

³³ H. T. Scarrott, “Closure of Access to Kwa Thema Township,” April 20, 1964, MSP T7/1, NASA.

would have included cycling.³⁴ It is also likely that this category included those who used what an official Springs Town Council record referred to as “pirate taxis.” These were small sedans that were not officially licensed by the municipality as commercial carriers.³⁵ The aggrieved white residents wanted to prevent mixing and so “asked the council to find an alternative route for them.”³⁶

<Insert figure 2 about here>

The ire of the residents is perplexing, since the volume of workers moving through the suburbs was not high. For instance, taking the 1962 survey by a brick manufacturing company of 1,000 workers cycling over a period of four hours, this means that about 250 people per hour, or four per minute, were moving through the suburbs by bicycle.³⁷ These considerations then invite closer scrutiny on their mode of mobility within the prevailing political context. If the workers had been moving quickly, as they might have in motorized vehicles, and in low volumes, it is unlikely that their cacophony would have irritated white residents. Furthermore, from a white motoring perspective, fast-moving workers would not have been obstacles on the roads to be bypassed. Residents of Selcourt and Selection Park responded specifically to what they perceived as a challenge to apartheid spatial segregation.

In response to complaints from white residents, the council called in its engineer to help because, unlike the roads leading north and northeast from KwaThema, there were no roads or paths

³⁴ Springs Town Council, “Provision of Monorail System between Kwa-Thema and Nuffield Industrial Townships,” March 16, 1964, MSP 53/17, NASA.

³⁵ Springs Town Council, “Pirate Taxis in Traffic—Non-European Taxi Ranks,” March 16, 1964, MSP 2/1/4/596, NASA.

³⁶ “Reef Africans” 3.

³⁷ H. T. Scarrott, “Closure of Access to Kwa Thema Township,” April 20, 1964, MSP T7/1, NASA.

to Nuffield. Workers traveling through Selcourt and Selection Park had effectively created their own routes from KwaThema for much of the journey to Nuffield. A map drawn by the manager of a brick factory through whose property the workers traveled showed the route they created—and the interviewees confirmed that they actually took this route. Upon leaving KwaThema, workers first crossed open fields, heading either south or east. Respondents described the open field area as a “forest,” where they risked getting their bicycles punctured by thorns or encountering criminals. Those following the southern route then traveled along the fence of the southern boundary of a mining and light manufacturing area. The fence prevented a more direct route through the area, although there is evidence that it was occasionally breached by workers. Workers then entered a road (Charterland Avenue) in the interior of the suburb of Selcourt before continuing on to Nuffield. Those who chose to travel eastward from KwaThema after leaving the fields passed through the interior of the mining and light manufacturing area. They appeared to do so through an opening cut in a fence; had the fence been intact, these workers would likely have stuck to the northern boundary of the mining and light manufacturing area. They then shifted to a different road (Coaton Avenue) between the two suburbs (Selcourt and Selection Park) before entering Nuffield.³⁸ These routes were more direct, saving workers about 13 kilometers in travel distance (see figure 3).

<Insert figure 3 about here>

Controlling Mobility

To control the workers’ self-directed mobility, planners devised technological tools. One idea the town engineer came up with to discourage workers from using the routes was to erect

³⁸ H. T. Scarrott, “Closure of Access to Kwa Thema Township,” April 20, 1964, MSP T7/1, NASA; Town clerk, “Cycle and Pedestrian Traffic: KwaThema/Nuffield,” May 15, 1964, MSP/2/1/4/462/153/17/1, NASA.

physical barriers, such as fences, to divert them. Another was to build a Black-only road parallel to a highway that was being planned at the time. A third proposal was to construct a bicycle path that would start in KwaThema, turn east, and then parallel the same proposed highway. For the “safety” of bicycle commuters, a fence would be erected on either side to prevent cycling on the highway (the one adjacent to “Death Road” was called the Bantu Cycle Track, in line with apartheid nomenclature for Black Africans). A fourth idea was to build a dedicated rail line, or monorail.³⁹ The monorail concept was lauded in one newspaper as an admirable solution: “Thousands of Africans in Springs w[ould] travel in the comfort and style of a luxury monorail.”⁴⁰ On September 27, 1963, a film demonstrating how such a system might work was shown to town officials by a potential provider of the service, presumably in an effort to persuade them to adopt it.⁴¹ Keeping the cost of riding the monorail reasonable was considered crucial to encouraging “many cyclists and pedestrians . . . to use such a system.”⁴² While these and other options were being studied, the town

³⁹ Town clerk, “Passage of Non-European Industrial Workers through European Areas,” July 29, 1963, MSP T7/1, NASA; J. L. Van der Walt, “Bantu Traffic between Kwa-Thema Township and Nuffield Industrial Township, Springs,” April 1, 1964, MSP 53/17, NASA.

⁴⁰ “Reef Africans” 3.

⁴¹ “Monorail Demonstration to Town Council,” *Springs and Brakpan Advertiser*, September 27, 1963, 4, SMRL.

⁴² “Monorail May Take Kwa-Thema Workers to Nuffield,” *Springs and Brakpan Advertiser*, August 23, 1963, SMRL.

engineer proposed that the council consider lowering the fares of existing bus service to attract pedestrians and cyclists.⁴³

These solutions, if implemented, would have discouraged Black workers from traveling through the white suburbs, thereby limiting contact between the two groups. However, to save money, the town engineer proposed another option that would not have eliminated contact: widening one of the streets (Coaton Avenue) adjacent to the suburb that some of the workers used. While this option would have continued to expose the groups to each other, it may have been considered acceptable by the whites in control because the higher speeds made possible by the increased road capacity would have made contact more fleeting.

Overall, the authorities felt that a combination of measures, including building barriers between KwaThema and the white suburbs, constructing cycle tracks alongside the highway, building a railway, and encouraging Black workers to use the highway itself via buses, would be the best long-term solution.⁴⁴ If these measures were implemented, the effect would be to prevent workers from traveling through the white suburbs. The Springs Town Council was not alone in this approach to urban segregation. The use of infrastructure to limit contact between the white and Black populations was a subnational government instance of what has been called “petty apartheid,” which amounted to the government seeking “to regulate racial contact in public spaces by separating amenities, such as park benches, public toilets, beaches, swimming pools and even

⁴³ Town clerk, “Passage of Non-European Industrial Workers through European Areas,” July 29, 1963, MSP T7/1, NASA; “Monorail May Take Kwa-Thema Workers to Nuffield,” *Springs and Brakpan Advertiser*, August 23, 1963, SMRL.

⁴⁴ Town clerk, “Passage of Non-European Industrial Workers through European Areas,” July 29, 1963, MSP T7/1, NASA.

graveyards.”⁴⁵ Such efforts extended to public transport services through the designation of separate vehicles or sections of vehicles, premises, and boarding stations.⁴⁶

The municipal technocratic machinery whirred to consider what could be done. The idea of the Black road that ran parallel to the planned highway was immediately rejected because it would not be approved by a regional government road agency, whose approval was required. Why this was the case was not explained, but it may have been due to the additional cost of a separate parallel road. While satisfying the whites’ desire to eliminate intergroup contact, a study found that the monorail would be too expensive to build and operate. To break even, the train would have to run at high capacity all day, and the fares would have to be higher than those charged for city buses. This model was not feasible since traffic in and out of KwaThema had only two high peaks per day (morning and evening). Furthermore, while the monorail may have been luxurious, workers would be unlikely to use it if the bus fare were cheaper. The rail proposal was rejected for similar reasons.⁴⁷

The conflict came to a boiling point—involving white-on-Black violence. The fact that the town council considered options that could not be implemented immediately suggests that African workers must have continued to “breach” the suburbs, in the words of white residents, who took matters in their own hands. In January 1966, three years after the white residents’ first petition to

⁴⁵ Rogerson, “Kicking Sand in the Face of Apartheid,” 98.

⁴⁶ Pirie, “Colours, Compartments and Corridors.”

⁴⁷ Springs Town Council, “Provision of Monorail System between Kwa-Thema and Nuffield Industrial Townships,” March 16, 1964, MSP 53/17, NASA. The idea of the off-road bicycle track adjacent to the motorway was never realized, as the motorway itself was not completed until the mid-1980s, and when it was finished, it did not have access and egress ramps to and from KwaThema.

the municipality, a newspaper reported that “a petition that Africans be prevented from cycling through the posh Springs suburb of Selcourt presented to the Springs Town Council by white residents three years ago is being organized again after the body of an African was found hanging from a tree.”⁴⁸ This second petition by white residents probably put pressure on the town council to finally resolve the problem.

Fences and a dedicated bicycle path became the tools of social separation. Evidence from the archives and interviews suggest that efforts to prevent workers from moving through Selcourt and Selection Park were largely successful after the construction of fences, an alternative road (which buses would have used), and a bicycle path adjacent to that road; these measures were intended to work in concert, as the design description provided by the municipality’s town clerk makes clear:

The Council has now indicated to the Department of Bantu Administration and Development that it intends building a road between KwaThema and Nuffield, south of Selcourt. If this road is constructed with a cycle track as intended and common boundary between Vereeniging Brick & Tile Co. and KwaThema and the barriers at AA and BB (as per plan to be tabled) be erected, I am of the opinion that the complaint that a large number of Bantu cyclists and pedestrians travel through Selection Park and Selcourt, will be minimized.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ “Body in Tree, so Ban on Cyclists,” *Rand Daily Mail*, January 26, 1966, 3. The newspaper did not elaborate on the cause of the man’s death.

⁴⁹ Town clerk, “Cycle and Pedestrian Traffic: KwaThema/Nuffield,” May 15, 1964, MSP/2/1/4/462/153/17/1, NASA.

In December 1964, the town clerk reported that the Department of Bantu Administration and Development had approved the construction of the road. This approval prompted the municipality to erect fences on the south side of KwaThema.⁵⁰ In June 1967, a newspaper signaled further progress, noting that “a new road would be built between KwaThema and Nuffield Industrial Township to bypass the White suburb of Selcourt.”⁵¹ This new road, called Rhokana Road, connected KwaThema to a preexisting road south of Selcourt called Rhokana Avenue. While planning documents had linked a cycle path to the new road, it turned out that the cycle path was built next to Rhokana Avenue instead, no doubt because the engineers saw this as a more effective way of preventing cycle traffic from KwaThema from mixing with motorized suburban traffic from Selcourt and Selection Park (figure 4). It had long been clear to the manager of the Vereeniging Brick and Tile Company, through whose property some workers traveled, that the existence of a road that roughly followed the routes through Selcourt and Selection Park would help persuade the workers not to travel through the white neighborhoods. While he had resisted fencing off his property as the municipality had requested, arguing that the workers would simply cut the fence to avoid the 20-kilometer bus ride, he agreed to fence off the company’s property once the bicycle path was built.⁵²

<Insert figure 4 about here>

While the exact time frame of the town’s implementation is difficult to establish through archives, the fences, cycle paths, and alternate roads did materialize, as interviewees recollected. They also remembered that they did indeed discourage workers from traveling through the white

⁵⁰ J. A. van Blerk, “Fencing of Southern Boundary of KwaThema,” December 22, 1964, MSP 2/1/4/447, NASA.

⁵¹ “Springs to Move Its Mid-Town Hostel,” *Rand Daily Mail*, June 7, 1967, 3.

⁵² H. T. Scarrott, “Closure of Access to Kwa Thema Township,” April 20, 1964, MSP T7/1, NASA.

suburbs. One recalled that her father had told her that he had to “go around” Selcourt and Selection Park because of the fence.⁵³ It is also noteworthy that the fences, paths, and alternate roads were erected at the same time that Black workers living in a barracks compound in Selcourt from where they traveled to work in Nuffield were forcibly relocated to KwaThema by the municipality owing to complaints from white residents.⁵⁴ The social separation of traffic flow and the housing measures of apartheid thus went hand in hand.

Submission and Resistance

Fences, new roads, and bicycle paths encouraged workers to abandon their route through Selcourt and Selection Park. These measures, however, were not enough to stop workers from traveling through these white neighborhoods. Preventing them from using neighborhood streets as shortcuts also required action on the part of white supremacists. Residents reinforced the regulatory power of hard infrastructures by hiring a private security firm to patrol the suburbs and ensure that Black workers traveling to Nuffield used alternate routes. One interviewee recalled being told by a colleague, “You see there is a fence there. No one is allowed to walk there. Don’t go and walk there because there are two or three cars that patrol in between the houses. They are the ones that are guarding the houses.”⁵⁵

The private security guards may have simply verbally instructed Black workers to leave the suburb. If the workers didn’t, they risked being attacked by white residents or arrested and turned over to the police.⁵⁶ One interviewee reported that he never walked through the suburb because he

⁵³ Mgidi, interview.

⁵⁴ “Springs to Move.”

⁵⁵ Phakoa, interview.

⁵⁶ Mgidi, interview.

knew that this could happen. He also observed that his coworkers made the decision to stay away from the interior of the suburb and instead travelled around the suburbs: “People were now taking round trips with bicycles and others with buses.”⁵⁷ Given the municipality’s delay in implementing policies, it is likely that the efforts of local residents played a significant role in shaping workers’ travel patterns. Interviewees repeatedly referred to these efforts, which could affect even those who were allowed to live in the neighborhoods because they worked there. A domestic worker who lived in Selcourt described being verbally warned to stay off the grass of front lawns, indicating that residents told her, “We are going to call the police when you walk there.”⁵⁸ Those who issued these warnings believed that workers should walk in the gutter of the street.

As these examples suggest, workers’ mobility was choreographed not only at the macro-spatial level but also in micro-practices on the streets.⁵⁹ For Black Africans born in the late 1950s and early 1960s onward, a children’s traffic training center that opened in 1963 would prove critically influential in self-disciplining traffic behavior. The center, which was created with the financial support of a petroleum company (the Vacuum Oil Company), trained children to engage in “orderly” behavior while cycling, teaching them how to use hand gestures to communicate that they were stopping or changing direction. Those workers who cycled to work after the construction of the off-road paths around Selcourt and Selection Park stayed on them. A law dating back to 1939 made it illegal to ride on the street where cycle paths existed. As one interviewee recalled, if the

⁵⁷ Phakoa, interview.

⁵⁸ Hadebe, interview.

⁵⁹ L. P. De Jager, “Traffic Training Centre—Replacement of Tricycles,” August 14, 1967, MSP 2/1/4/462/153/17/2, NASA. For similar campaigns in Europe and the United States: Norton, *Fighting Traffic*; Oldenziel and Albert de la Bruhère, “Contested Spaces.”

traffic police “found that you were not using the cycle path they would give you a ticket.”⁶⁰ They then had to pay a fine, although not very high given their limited income, severely eroded into their their personal and household budgets.⁶¹ Another respondent recalled that errant cyclists could also be subject to corporal punishment by the police.⁶² He recalled that “you must be in the bicycle path otherwise it’s a hiding.”⁶³ Pedestrians were also disciplined by the police for crossing roads at undesignated locations.⁶⁴ Policing tactics also appeared to be unpredictable. One explained that “they used motorbikes, and you will think they are not there and find out they hid behind the trees.”⁶⁵ Thus, even when the police weren’t there, workers didn’t lower their guard; they felt that the police were always “monitoring and waiting for us . . . [and] we would find them anywhere.”⁶⁶

The workers’ sense of constant surveillance reflects the broader political milieu of apartheid and may explain why, although Black Africans frequently complained to town council authorities about the inadequacy of bus services for KwaThema residents, none of the interviewees recalled anyone taking collective action to address injustices such as harassment by white motorists while walking or cycling. This may explain gaps in descriptions of the experience of walking and cycling

⁶⁰ Nhlapo, interview.

⁶¹ Nhlapo, interview. As early as 1939, the Spring Town Council passed a law requiring cyclists to stay on cycle paths: “It shall be an offence for any cyclist or pedestrian to travel on the remaining portion of such road, except at intersections.” Administrator, “Municipality of Springs—Traffic By-Laws Amendments,” February 15, 1939, TAB 2/2/881/14/9/3, NASA.

⁶² Mapheleba, interview.

⁶³ Mapheleba, interview.

⁶⁴ Mapheleba, interview.

⁶⁵ Nhlapo, interview.

⁶⁶ Msiza, interview.

to work in archival documents about the political work of KwaThema residents and their white allies during this period.⁶⁷ One interviewee noted that the focus was on “politics and the struggle, politics all the time.”⁶⁸ The lack of mobilization of workers against measures to control their walking and cycling practices was undoubtedly strongly linked to the disciplinary power of apartheid.⁶⁹ Nieftagodien found that the residents of KwaThema in the 1960s were devastated by the forced removals from Payneville and other acts of oppression. One of his interviewees reported that “everyone in the location was afraid. Very few people tried to do something but they failed.”⁷⁰ For example, while the manager of the brick factory was worried about the fences being cut, in the context of ever more coercive actions, as one interviewee noted, at that time “you wouldn’t dare” cut the fences.⁷¹ Further, “you will not do anything wrong or do anything, anyhow, in the street we were scared.”⁷²

Despite the strong measures to control workers’ mobility, interviewees mentioned that there was some resistance caused by design flaws in the bicycle paths, as well as employers’ demands

⁶⁷ Nhlapo, interview; Msiza, interview; KwaThema Advisory Board, “Minutes of the Informal Meeting of the KwaThema Bantu Advisory Board,” March 19, 1966, MSP 2/1/4380/120/5/16, NASA; Springs Town Council, “Transfer of Buses to Non-European Services,” July 20, 1962, MSP 2/1/4/381, NASA.

⁶⁸ Sedibe, interview.

⁶⁹ Ballinger Family Papers (1980 1894), ZA HPRA A410-C-C2-C2.1-C2.1.54, WHP; Springs Joint Council of Europeans and Africans, Joint Council of Europeans and Africans (1973 1921), ZA HPRA AD1433-C-Cs-Cs4, WHP; Helen Suzman Papers (2009 1944), ZA HPRA A2084, WHP.

⁷⁰ Nieftagodien, “Making of Apartheid,” 22.

⁷¹ Mgidi, interview.

⁷² Mgidi, interview.

that workers be punctual. Respondents noted that the bicycle paths were too narrow to accommodate the volume of bicycle traffic, especially during peak hours. As a result, they became congested, leading to accidents.⁷³ Such collisions were also caused by workers riding fast to get to work on time. As one recalls, “we ha[d] to clock in, and we clock[ed] in at 7 o’clock in the morning.”⁷⁴ As a workaround, some workers would leave the cycle path and ride on the main roadway, quickly returning to the lane if traffic officers were spotted.⁷⁵ Such cat-and-mouse games were also played with motorists. One reported, “As long there is no car we are in the road; when the cars come we got off the road.”⁷⁶ If they did not leave the road, motorists would remind them by honking and shouting.⁷⁷ However, these acts of micro-resistance were few and far between; most workers took the routes they were supposed to take to avoid Selcourt and Selection Park.

The struggles for workers to attain free mobility to and from KwaThema in the face of controlling efforts by white supremacists were predicated on their being independently mobile. In “Travelling Together Alone and Alone Together,” a study that evaluates the potential of different transport modes to provide exposure to diversity, urbanists Marco te Brömmelstroet and his coauthors argue that between public transport and private cars, on the one hand, and cycling and walking, on the other, the latter are the most promising because they allow “the user to explore their spatial surroundings” and provide a “constant opportunity for spontaneous interaction with other users and the surrounding environment.”⁷⁸ Walking further increases “social interaction potential”

⁷³ Nhlapo, interview.

⁷⁴ Nhlapo, interview.

⁷⁵ Phakoa, interview; Nhlapo, interview.

⁷⁶ Moja, interview.

⁷⁷ Phakoa, interview.

⁷⁸ Te Brömmelstroet et al., “Travelling Together Alone,” 7.

because of “the exposed nature of the pedestrian.”⁷⁹ While walking and cycling through Selcourt and Selection Park, the workers moved slowly, which had the effect of underscoring their defiance of the apartheid segregationist imperative. The workers performed what Derek Alderman and Joshua Inwood call “countermobility work,” which they describe as “the full range of bodily, social, and technological efforts required for working people to move in ways that subvert and survive white supremacy.”⁸⁰

Conclusion

This article is a new contribution to the scholarship on racialized mobility in apartheid South Africa. It offers new empirical evidence on the technological dynamics of social control and workers’ responses to them. In Springs, technical control measures were implemented to prevent industrial workers from using a main road to and from the Nuffield area, which would have doubled workers’ travel distances to and from work and required them to spend part of their meager incomes on transportation. In response, workers sought alternative modes and routes through a white suburb, until they were similarly challenged by white residents. While workers occasionally resisted, they mostly complied with the measures because they were comprehensive; not only did white authorities implement hard infrastructure (fences, roads, cycle paths), but white residents also acted through verbal reprimands, backed up by disciplinary social institutions (police, law, private security guards) within a subordinating milieu of apartheid. The scope for resistance was therefore limited to micro-violations, such as briefly leaving the bicycle path to ride on the main road.

The findings of this study have broader implications for the relationship between resistance and mobilities in postcolonial societies such as South Africa. White supremacists took particular

⁷⁹ Te Brömmelstroet et al., “Travelling Together Alone,” 8.

⁸⁰ Alderman and Inwood, “Mobility as Antiracism Work,” 598.

umbrage at Black Africans moving through their neighborhoods because their relatively slow pace of walking and cycling in comparison to vehicles or trains extended the time they were visibly and physically resisting racially segregated spaces. To make matters worse from the perspective of white residents, these acts of resistance took place every day, following the predictable rhythms of morning and evening commutes. This explains why municipal authorities even considered the relatively costly rail and bus as alternative modes of transport for Black Africans: interracial contact could be better minimized by encasing Black passengers in metallic exoskeletons, away from white eyes. The potential of cycling and walking to increase opportunities to meet a variety of people and thus perhaps promote acceptance of diversity suggests that these practices may be well suited to reconciliation efforts in South Africa.

Finally, this study raises questions that can be pursued in the future. While there have been a number of studies of transport histories and racialized mobilities in settler-colonial contexts in North America, they remain limited in the African context. One question that KwaThema raises is that of gendered cycling practices and attitudes both past and present. While women cycled during the study period, male respondents questioned both their ability to cycle and the appropriateness of doing so. Perhaps they considered it more suitable for women to either walk or use vehicles. Could these attitudes explain the dearth of women cyclists in KwaThema that is evident in contemporary observations? This article has also underscored the flexible interpretation of technology by showing how various hard infrastructures, such as bike lanes, were mobilized in the “dark work” of controlling the mobility of Black workers. In the contemporary “return” of the bicycle as a commuting solution in urban spaces around the world, bike lanes are viewed favorably by their advocates as road safety solutions. In KwaThema, however, the question arises as to how residents who cycle on bike lanes that were historically created to subordinate their users now perceive them (see figure 1).

Bio/Acknowledgments

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Captions

FIG. 1. Workers on an off-street bicycle path next to "Death Road," built in the 1950s. This cycle path was built after pressure was exerted by white motorists on the town council to 'remove' the cyclists from the main carriageway. It was a means of controlling the micromobility choices of Black workers veiled in the pretext of road safety, July 26, 2019. *Source*: author's collection.

FIG. 2. Workers arriving at a bicycle factory in Nuffield, 1950s. For KwaThema residents, commuting by bicycle was a reasonable choice because it was an efficient and money-saving way to get to work. These rationales which offered independence of mobility to Black workers collided with Apartheid's racial segregation of urban space. *Source*: SMRL.

FIG. 3. Flow of workers from KwaThema to and from the Nuffield industrial area. In the segregated spatial landscape, workers on bicycles and foot sought the most efficient routes to work. The routes labeled "cut through" are the direct and shorter routes to and from Nuffield that workers chose. *Source*: Mncedisi Siteleki.

FIG. 4. A close-up view of a cycle path adjacent to Rhokana Avenue, July 26, 2019. The cycle path had dual goals. One aim was to redirect Black workers from travelling through the white suburbs and in doing so, adding to their travel time and distance to and from work. The other was to “free” white motor traffic from mixing with cycle traffic from an adjacent roadway: a law dating back to the 1930s required that where cycle paths were available, cyclists were to use them. It has been poorly maintained, as evidenced by the crumbling surface. *Source*: author’s collection.