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Changing urban policy from below: the case study of Somali migrants in Johannesburg

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Abstract

In Johannesburg, the Somali migrant community has set up businesses in Mayfair. Mayfair is a suburb situated on the western side of Johannesburg's original central business district, and has gradually witnessed a process of urban change and transformation outside the regulations of the City of Johannesburg Metropolitan. Based on the regulations of the area, 8th Avenue is zoned for residential use. However, at the moment, the area has witnessed radical changes, which have seen people engage in many unplanned activities. Such developments have not gone unnoticed by the City of Johannesburg's Urban Planning officials, who argue that the area is zoned for residential purposes and laws have to be adhered to before the space is altered from residential to business use. However, the Somali business migrants in the area continue change the residential component of the area, despite the laws against such construction. The research report looks at how Somalis in Mayfair continue to change the 8th Avenue area, despite the City of Johannesburg's restrictions around the use of space as business. Engaging in this concept of human-non-human interaction, derived from Actor Network Theory (ANT), the research explains how materials and artefacts of the city, in this case, land use regulatory tools, assist in regulating social and spatial conduct, and human activities. In what then follows, the research traces how Somali migrants of Mayfair interact with the City of Johannesburg's urban management and planning practices through the movement of written materials that challenge urban management and usage. The research also illustrates, using de Certau's theory on strategies and tactics, how bureaucratic actions (through written documents) divide the city residents as well as city planners to create certain alliances, as well as tactics in the development of Mayfair. The research finally shows, using Lefebvre's theory of the right to the city, how Somalis migrants take possession of space and use the concept of the right to the city, as urban inhabitants, instead of relying on their right as refugees or asylum seekers.

Keywords: *Migration, Somalis, Mayfair, City of Johannesburg, Urban space, appropriation, negotiation, written documents*