

Emerging patterns of social and spatial (dis) integration in Suburban South Africa: The case of Mokopane

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the imaginations and use of space by black residents in Suburban South Africa, with a particular focus on the small town of Mokopane, in the context of urban desegregation and integration. Given the segregated spatial legacy of apartheid, the post-apartheid state has and continues to seek ways to create a non-racial and integrated society. However, twenty years after the demise of the apartheid regime and the country remains segregated along racial and class lines. In understanding some of the reasons why integration remains a challenge, this research investigates black residents' use of public spaces in the context of a supposedly desegregated space. It investigates the socio-spatial relations between residents of three adjoining suburbs, two of which are a product of apartheid and one a recent development of the state's spatial policy to create integrated communities. The study is not focused solely on the social and spatial relations within the confines of the study area but most significantly beyond that in order to comprehend people's relationship and meanings attached to space. Drawing from Lefebvre's theory of the production of space, imagined and psychoanalytical geographies, the study reflects on how people's identities, rooted in a history of colonialism and apartheid, affect the way they imagine and use space and, further, how the arrival of those considered as other reveals the symbolic meanings and boundaries that have been attached to space.

The study further draws from post-colonial literature on space to challenge prevalent notions of the relationship between race and space, with a particular focus on the rural-township-urban mobilities and what those mean in the construction of blackness. Thematic content and discourse analysis are used to decode meaning embedded in language in terms of how people relate to others socially and spatially. The dissertation reveals that, even in contexts where spatial desegregation has been attained, the use and imagination of space and the relationship to others are rooted within historical configurations of racial and class identities. Further, black residents' experience of historically white spaces remains rooted in their lived

experiences and in their understanding of their belonging in urban spaces as inherently white. It is against this backdrop that this research argues that, in the quest to develop integrated post-apartheid communities, the state has given insufficient, if any, thought on the ways space, class and race are produced relationally.