

Federica Duca

Post-Doc at Public Affairs Research Institute (PARI), Wits University, Johannesburg, South Africa

federicad@pari.org.za



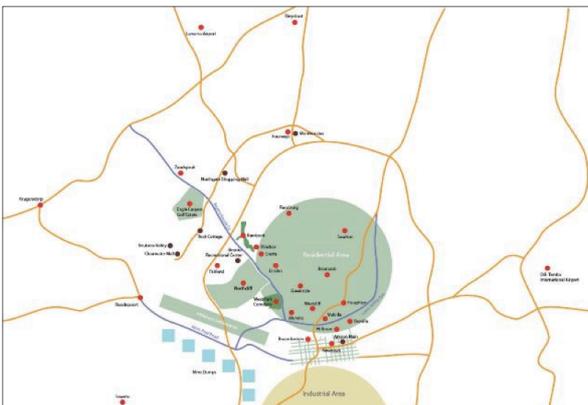
Federica is a Post-Doc at PARI, Wits University where she is working on elite formation and space. She has conducted research in Roodepoort, on the social consequences of daily life in gated communities. She is trained in Sociology and did her BA research on gangsterism and her MA research on residential segregation in an Italian coastal town. She has previously conducted research in South Africa on gangsterism and fear of crime in Soshanguve, near Pretoria. Her research interests include urban studies, representation of space, social construction of urban forms and means of its transformation. She is also interest in real estate market and in the new social and political spaces created in gated communities.

A response to the obsession with splintering. Johannesburg spaces under review- relationally.

Federica Duca

Keywords

splintering, gated communities, suburbs, inner city



Johannesburg is at the centre of most of scholarly work on African cities. It looks like there is an obsession with this metropolis form and outside the African continent. The copious academic production over this city is an indication of it. While attempts are made to de-provincialize this city, to read it as an ordinary city, following Robinson's suggestion, it seems that there is a certain scholarly fixation with the themes of splintering and fragmentation. However, the terms of its fragmentation, of its segregation and its splintering do not seem to be investigated if not by reiterating the fact that Johannesburg is indeed a splintered city. The fixation on splintering and fragmentation poses concerns regarding the "open and accessible" city. Mobility is of course a key component. But what are the infrastructures used by the residents, and how do they differ according to their space of residence? What constitutes the divide between the rich and the poor, apart from obvious material conditions? How is mobility linked to the way in which the city is perceived as splintered and fragmented? How do different spaces talk to each other? What institutions and spaces create fragmentation?

Resting on a long ethnographic work on the wealthy suburbs of Johannesburg this paper seeks to unfold the geography of Johannesburg detailing not only the movements of its residents, but trying to understand how these shape the city and the knowledge of it, thus looking at different spaces and at how they interact. The starting point of the investigation are two wealthy areas of Johannesburg, one new gated golf estate (Eagle Canyon) and an old open suburb (Northcliff), mostly white spaces, even though undergoing racial transformation. It starts thus from an elite perspective, from an elite view of the city, way of life and terms of knowledge of the city through its mobility. Considering two spaces that share the same socio-economic demographics but that do not share the same spatial organization (one is a gated golf estate and the other an open suburb) triggers a first reflection on the terms of segregation and splintering. The crucial methodological aspect is the relational perspective adopted in this study, which is not only unfolding dynamics between space and residents, but also between different actors in different spaces. This perspective facilitates the exploration of the different cities within Johannesburg and it tells how do they see each other.