

Contested spaces: mega-events and the production of urban space in a post-apartheid city: the case of Newtown, Johannesburg

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Introduction

South Africa is a country with a lengthy history of colonialism and apartheid. Under these powerful political ideologies South African cities and society were systematically divided as part of the logic of colonialism and then apartheid. It was, however, in 1948 that the spatial and social divisions became institutionalized resulting in a complex web of uneven and unjust social relations which manifested in the surrounding physical landscapes.



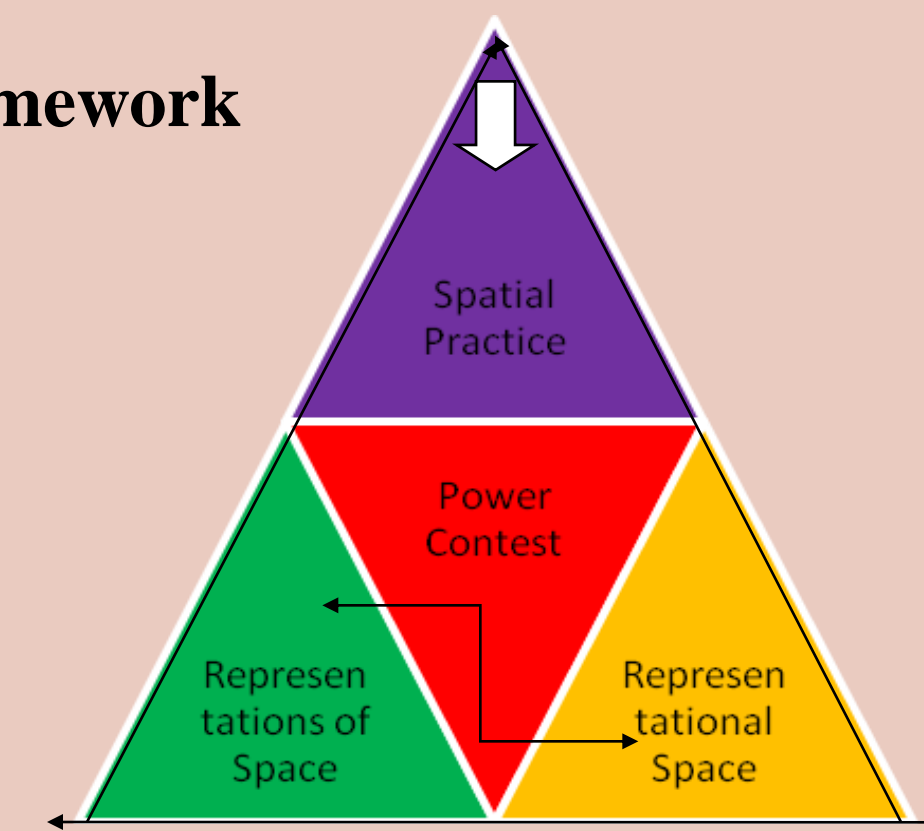
Under the apartheid system policies such as the Natives (Urban Areas) Act of 1923, the Group Areas Act of 1950, the Housing Act of 1920 and the Population Registry Act of 1950 were utilized methodically to ensure that the different races were kept apart and remained separate, impacting profusely on the production of urban spaces in the cities of Cape Town, Johannesburg and Durban. In light of these political events post-apartheid South Africa has sought mega-events to build bridges amongst diverse citizens and to re-construct a new post-apartheid national, political and economic identity.

Research methodology and other tools

The research is based on ethnography, which is a scientific research method in the social sciences. The ethnography approach involves three key elements:

- *a speech community in its natural environment
- *participant observation
- *interviews

Theoretical Framework



Lefebvre's (1991) spatial triad which is made up of *representations of space* (conceived space), *representational space* (lived space) and *spatial practice* (perceived space)

Research problem

The narrative of Newtown is a narrative of poor people from diverse cultural, social and racial backgrounds in what was an old, run-down and neglected part of central Johannesburg. It is also a context whose social space was transformed radically by the Dutch, the British and eventually the locally elected authorities. Under colonial and apartheid Johannesburg, political events changed the face of the area. Post-apartheid Johannesburg, and Newtown is today faced with new struggles over this social urban space.



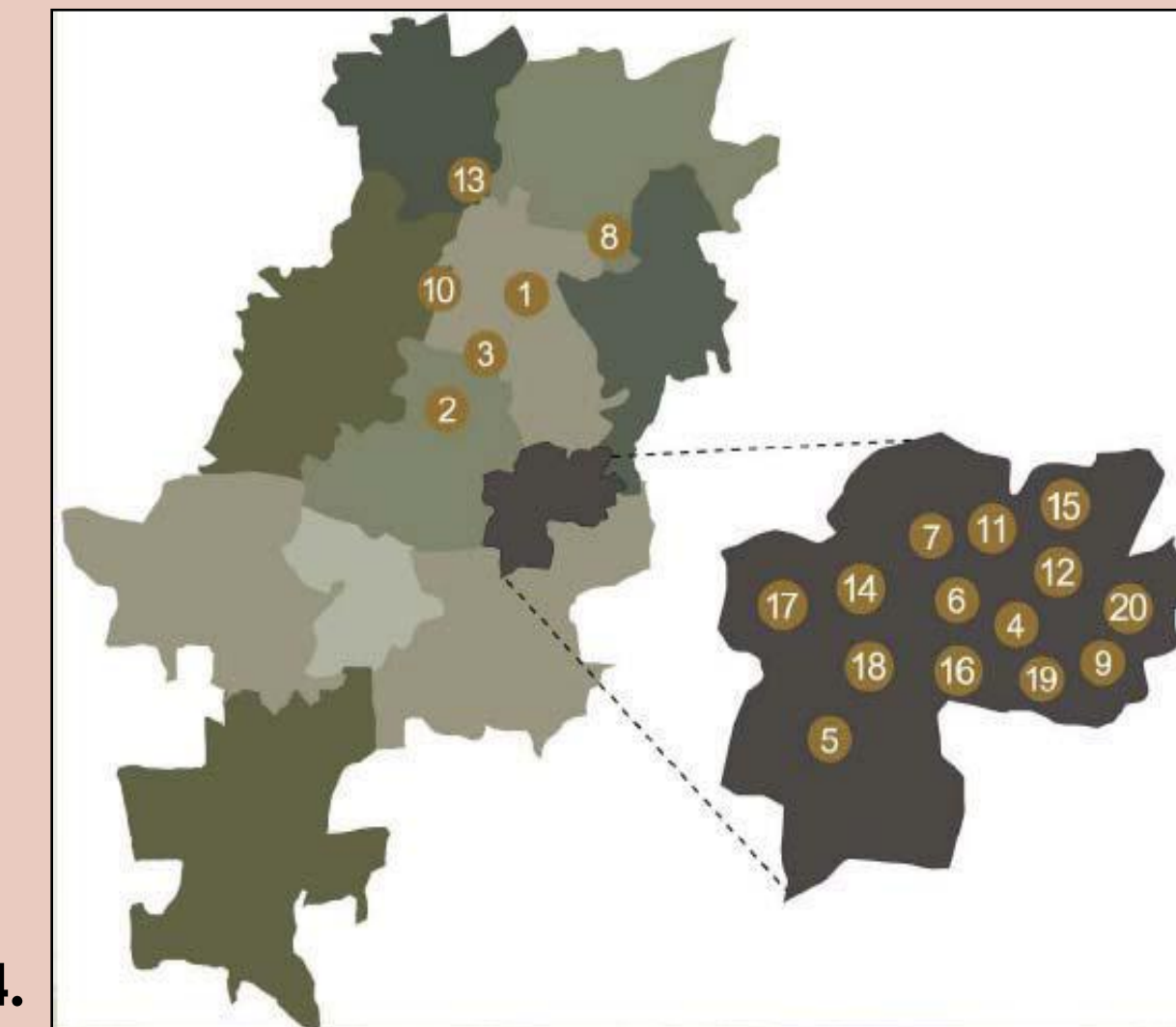
The hosting of hall-mark events such as the 1995 Rugby World Cup, the 1996 African Cup of Nations (AFCON), the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development, the 2003 Cricket World Cup, the 2009 FIFA Confederations (CONFED) Cup and the 2010 FIFA World Cup have all focused on the economic wind-fall and societal image building of a country whose society, reflected through its cities, is historically fragmented.



In post-apartheid Johannesburg the production of new urban spaces in the context of the 2010 FIFA World Cup occurs in non-traditional sites for the first time in South Africa. In 2010 the soccer spectacle was not only in stadia, it was extended into city centres through public viewing initiatives in assigned public spaces. In Newtown, it was the Mary Fitzgerald Square that accommodated the event. The question then becomes, what (new) meanings have been inscribed in the social space of Newtown through this event, and how do the 'new' meanings affect the manner by which public space in the post-apartheid city is conceived and contested?

Findings

➤ Improvement Districts in Johannesburg



4.

"Indaba (the thing is), before there used to be that big screen neh? And we used to come just sit when you're bored with your own television. Come and sit and watch... I don't know what happened it disappeared"

"It is just another open space! When it is not used it is an open space so you don't even think about it. You only notice it if there are activities"

➤ The 2010 FIFA World Cup inscribed new meaning in the social space of Newtown through signs communicating the identity, history and social significance of the urban space



5.a



5.b

"...something Fitzpatrick Patrick! What is it called? This was the Market before, it sold vegetables not like now. But most people they call it Market Theatre. Everybody I know they say meet 'meneer' Market Theatre then they know. If you gonna say they must meet what you call it? 'Gerald' what? That's another story"



6.

"There is a difference but it is not like a big deal, it is not a big deal. It is just a space where people come to watch soccer"

"I think, if they can just keep the screen here then maybe let this be an on-going thing you see? Not just after the world cup everything disappears"

"maybe if they can use the space like an exhibition, maybe say every Saturday they do stalls like this, maybe there are cultural activities there, there are people sitting here and stuff like that, still uniting people"

➤ Newtown's social space is a commodified and simulated urban space.

Conclusions

The adoption of the BID-model and the pursuit of the mega-event strategy, at the level of representational space, act to deepen social and spatial inequalities inherited from apartheid Johannesburg. Under apartheid, the urban inhabitants of Newtown of all races and cultural backgrounds co-existed in harmony; united by poverty. In the post-apartheid city, Newtown's social space is once again dominated by representations of space, where the black middle-class inhabit, but not appropriate. In the context of Newtown it is neither race nor class that undermines democratic efforts and cohesion at the lived level, rather, it is the mode of production, bureaucracy and a lack of in-depth understanding of contemporary public space.

The 2010 FIFA World Cup opened up possibilities for the City and its inhabitants to re-conceptualize, re-consider and re-construct the social relations of the post-apartheid city, with public space acting as key. Indeed, the mega sporting-event, though experienced in unison, meant different things for different agents at different levels. At the lived level the event presented an opportunity to experience the urban Square in unprecedented ways.

At the conceived level the success of the event re-enforced the current conceptions of the public space and the urban space as commodity whose *exchange* value has become all the more fundamental and significant over the urban space's *use* value. This, consequentially, leading to an uneven spatial practice that re-enforces the spatial contradictions embedded in the urban fabric of the contemporary and post-apartheid Johannesburg city.

Literature cited

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- List of pictures:** Picture 1: The Market building on completion in 1913
 Picture 2: Spatial practice in Aaron's Ground in late 19th & early 20th century
 Picture 3: Giant statue made from coca-cola crates for the mega sporting-event in 2010
 Picture 4: Johannesburg municipality CID map (www.kum.co.za) *UrbanGenesis*
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 Picture 6: Remnants of the old park station in the post-apartheid city
 Picture 7: The 'new' town of the 'old' town dominated by black middle-class inhabitants

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