

Creating parallel public spaces through private governments: a South African case study

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Abstract:

This paper argues that in central Cape Town different public spaces exist in parallel to each other, continuing the long history of dysfunctional public spaces in South Africa. While some have suggested that the recent spread of privately governed and policed public spaces means that they have become privatised and form part of a segregated landscape of enclaves, the empirical data suggest a different assessment. Although agreeing that privately policed public spaces are distinctly different from 'regular', not privately governed spaces. In fact they have become more public than they were before. Here, the middle class that used to hide out in gated communities and shopping malls mingles again. Through this the existence of different parallel existing public spaces is being continued. Since the colonization of Cape Town, public space has always been segregated, especially with the exclusion of non-white parts of the population. Over time, each of the different segregated public spaces has developed their own cultures, norms and values. Within the researched spaces, this 'tradition' of dysfunctional public space continues. While the non-white urban poor congregate in 'regular' public spaces, a white, latté-consuming class of those who can afford it enjoy peace in the parallel existing public space.