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Enclave urbanism as telescopic urbanism? Encounters of middle class whites in Cape Town

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Abstract Drawing on photo-elicitation interviews with middle class, white residents of a privileged neighborhood of Cape Town, this paper infers that many scholars rely on a narrow understanding of the nature and the geography of encounters in cities to make exaggerated claims about the effects of enclave urbanism. Inspired by Amin's (2013a) notion of telescopic urbanism, the author moves beyond the sedentarist focus on residential enclaves to conceptualize a wide range of encounters which may occur inside and in-between enclaves. In the empirical sections, the paper demonstrates that the retreat into patrolled neighborhoods, upscale shopping malls and private transportation is inspired not only by the ambition to avoid crime, but also by the desire to circumvent confrontations with racialized poverty. Yet, by focusing on moments of stasis and mobility inside and in-between various enclaves, the author argues that encounters across lines of race and class still do occur and have the potential to challenge privileged residents to reconsider their stereotypes about the poor and to become aware of their own privileges. As such, the paper ends with a call for more profound, empirical and context-sensitive studies on encounters in enclave cities.

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1. Introduction

Over the last two decades, the global spread of various forms of enclosed, mono-functional areas has received much attention in the urban studies literature. Research on gated communities, guarded shopping malls, secured office parks and fenced-off tourist resorts has stimulated scholars worldwide to proclaim the materialization of a new urban geography characterized by enclavism (e.g. Atkinson, 2006; Caldeira, 1996; Davis, 1992; Douglass, Wissink, & van Kempen, 2012). This 'enclave urbanism' is marked by the hardening of socio-spatial boundaries with walls, fences and booms and the imposition of socio-legal agreements and specific governance regimes within the resulting enclaves (Atkinson & Blandy, 2005: 177; Breitung, 2012: 279).

Much of the academic interest in enclave urbanism stems from the conviction that the spatial separation of the privileged has negative effects on the social situation of the underprivileged. First, researchers underline that the proliferation of legal and material boundaries limits access to previously public spaces (Breitung, 2012: 290). Second, scholars warn that the protection of enclaves with CCTV cameras, private security personnel and electric fencing may displace crime to people and places that cannot afford such security measures (Atkinson & Blandy, 2005: 185). Third, there is a concern that the private provision of services and amenities in privileged enclaves encourages local authorities to cut down on their provision elsewhere (Low, 2008). Finally, scholars are worried that extreme segregation threatens the realization of social justice and solidarity at the urban scale by inhibiting face-to-face encounters with poverty and diversity. "In short", Atkinson and Flint (2004: 877) ask, "how is empathy for inequality and social problems engendered if it is never or rarely experienced?"

In empirical studies on enclave urbanism, attention for this last issue is growing. Much of the literature infers that enclave urbanism allows the privileged to choose with whom they interact in their everyday lives. Drawing on an exploratory analysis of surveys, visits, interviews and mystery shopping calls, Atkinson and Flint (2004: 877) answer their own question, for instance, by stating that "it is now possible for social factions to exercise unprecedented control over their experience of the city in terms of to whom, how and when social encounters are made". Likewise, Pow(2009) explains how the development of enclave urbanism in China is resulting in – and motivated by – the formation of a middle-class landscape that masks and depoliticizes class inequalities (cf. Zhou, Deng, Kwan, & Yan, 2015). In India, Fernandes (2004) and Ghertner (2012) reveal how the drive to establish 'world class cities' marked by gates, fences and security guards heralds a new urban aesthetics which targets a 'politics of forgetting' by rendering specific marginalized groups invisible.

Recently, such straightforward relationships between the rise of enclave urbanism and the decline of encounters have also been called into question, however. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork in the 'borderlands' between a gated community and a low-income neighborhood in Shanghai, Iossifova (2015) concludes that the paths of middle-class professionals, rural-to-urban migrants and poor urbanites still cross each other, both inside and in-between enclaves (cf. Douglass et al., 2012). Rather than accepting

that the splintered urban fabric of Chinese cities veils the rapidly growing gap between the rich and the poor, she calls for attention to the alternative ways of being-together in “shared spaces of informal, unplanned and spontaneous encounter” (Iossifova, 2015: 105).

In this paper, I aim to respond to Iossifova's call by elaborating on the interrelationships between enclaves and encounters both theoretically and empirically. My main argument is that many scholars have distorted views about the effects of enclave urbanism by relying on a narrow understanding of the nature and the geography of encounters across difference. From a theoretical point of view, the next section explains how Amin's (2013a) notion of telescopic urbanism helps to conceptualize the wide range of encounters that occur in cities. Rather than focusing on encounters in the residential sphere alone, attention is needed for both sedentary and mobile encounters inside and in between various kinds of enclaves. Drawing on photo-elicitation interviews with middle class whites living in a privileged suburb of Cape Town, the remainder of the paper substantiates this claim empirically.

2. Telescopic urbanism

In 'Telescopic urbanism and the poor', Amin (2013a) criticizes the dominant way in which cities have been studied. In his eyes, it is problematic that very different actors refrain from considering cities to be spaces of shared life and common rights. On the one hand, advocates of the ‘business consultancy city’ tend to lose the immediate needs of the absolute majority of the urban population out of sight. On the other, promoters of the ‘human potential city’ believe that slum dwellers can improve their existence without making demands on the state, the economic elites and the growing middle classes. For Amin, both urban imaginaries are ‘telescopic’: by turning their lenses on specific parts of the city, they obscure the connections and interdependencies which mark contemporary cities as relational assemblages. “With no regard for the city as a social whole”, Amin (2013a: 484) argues, telescopic urbanism “dismantles the politics of shared turf, common interests and mutual obligations, in the process negating the poor anything more than their own enclaves and efforts, exonerating the rich, powerful and influential to do anything about slum/squatter city”.

While Amin has thrown up the notion of telescopic urbanism to challenge the partial imaginaries through which novelists, journalists and scholars look at cities, he suggests that the visual metaphor can also be useful to investigate everyday lives in enclave cities. In an interview with Matthew Gandy, Amin (2013b) explains that ‘scopic regimes of urban neglect’ do not only affect the discourses of scholars in the field of urban studies, but also the practices of elites in cities. For him, the sense of proximity and distance among urban strangers is not only affected by the dynamics of face-to-face encounters, but also by the aesthetic of the built environment, the sensory feel of a city and the visibility of different groups in public space (Amin, 2010: 5). “If today the majority city and its needs are ignored by elites — perhaps also scholarship”, Amin (2013b: 88) infers, “it is because it is placed out of sight, and for this, forgotten or made anomalous”.

This paper investigates three ways in which Amin's metaphor of telescopic urbanism can inform our understanding of encounters in enclave cities. First, Amin's (2013a: 477) plea to bring the whole city back into view helps us to reconsider enclave urbanism as a spatial form that affects the entire urban structure. Obviously, very little can be said about the effects of enclave urbanism as long as scholars point their telescope at residential enclaves alone and ignore the time spent at work, at leisure and other out-of-home locations (Kwan, 2013; Wang, Li, & Chai, 2012). Following Amin's call to stop treating cities as incoherent amalgams of disjunctive neighbourhoods, this paper considers (the lack of) encounters in different spheres of everyday life, rather than in the residential sphere alone.

Second, Amin's metaphor also compels us to focus on the movements between enclaves. While many assumptions about the detrimental effects of enclave urbanism are based on sedentary studies focusing on one particular place, mostly the place of residence, a growing body of literature suggests that mobile encounters between different residential, office and leisure enclaves can be meaningful as well (e.g. Hill, 2012; Iossifova, 2015; Van Kempen & Wissink, 2014; Wilson, 2011; Yazici, 2013). Just like a telescope mount needs to compensate for the earth's rotation in order to track the real motion of the stars, researchers can only discover the social repercussions of living in enclave cities if they follow people from one enclave to another. This implies a people-based, rather than a place-based point of departure (Kwan, 2009).

Third, Amin's metaphor helps us to broaden the types of encounter under study. Over the last decade, the emergence of a 'geographies of encounter' literature has stimulated geographers to question whether interpersonal interactions can make people reconsider normative assumptions about class, race and (multi)culture and pave the way for more progressive, interracial and cross-class alliances (e.g. Lawson & Elwood, 2014; Valentine, 2008; Wilson, 2011). Often, it is underlined that significant transformations are only spurred, however, in common activities and long-term engagements across lines of race and class and that streets, squares and parks provide, at worst, opportunities for superficial exchanges which harden negative stereotypes and, at best, incidental encounters which comply with the norms of civility and political correctness (Matejskova & Leitner, 2011: 728; Valentine, 2008). Inspired by the role of visibility in Amin's metaphor of telescopic urbanism, this paper investigates to what extent eye contact and visual exposure to people, objects and places may initiate new engagements across cultural differences, socio-economic inequalities and spatial enclaves as well.

3. Enclave urbanism in Cape Town

South African cities are generally not understood in terms of interaction and negotiation, but in terms of segregation and separation. The apartheid state planned mono-racial residential zones in such a way that the paths of whites, coloreds, Black Africans and Indians did not have to cross each other (Christopher, 2001; Western, 1996). Racially divided seating arrangements on public transport, racially segregated places of boarding and disembarkation and racially distinctive transport routes enforced segregation on the move (Pirie, 1992). The circumvention of interracial encounters did not only target the

reproduction of economic privilege and the perpetuation of political power, but also the consolidation of an unambiguous, white identity that was based on social and spatial distance from blacks (Ballard, 2004; Nahnsen, 2006).

More than twenty years after the repeal of the discriminatory laws, many of the processes and dynamics initiated in apartheid years continue to reproduce the socio-spatial inequalities of the past (Newton & Schuermans, 2013; Turok, 2001). Even though a small number of black South Africans have been able to climb the social ladder, and even though being white no longer guarantees prosperity, both wealth and poverty are still very much racialized (Leibbrandt, Finn, & Woolard, 2012). The stark socio-economic inequalities are also very visible in the urban landscape. While most low-cost housing projects are still located in the urban peripheries, the South African residential landscape in the higher income categories is characterized by gated communities, security estates, neighborhood watches and private security companies (Lemanski, Landman, & Durrington, 2008; Paasche, 2012). Outside the immediate living environment, one notices a proliferation of shopping malls (Ferreira & Visser, 2007), secured office complexes (Murray, 2011) and city improvement districts (Bénit-Gbaffou, Didier, & Morange, 2008; McDonald, 2008; Samara, 2011).

To understand the popularity of these enclaves, it is important to note that South Africa is one of the most crime-ridden countries in the world. In 2006, Altbeker (2007: 41) calculated that the murder rate of South Africa was eight times higher than the one of the United States and 122 times higher than the average of Western Europe. Based on such statistics, the Institute for Security Studies concluded that violent crimes “are dangerously close to becoming out of control” (Burger, 2010: 10). Figures on the extent of fear of crime are similarly disheartening. The South African Social Attitudes Survey revealed that the proportion of South Africans feeling ‘very unsafe’ or ‘a bit unsafe’ increased from 15% to 33% between 1998 and 2005, while the percentage that reported feeling very unsafe on most days trebled from 5 to 15% over the same period of time (Roberts, 2010: 261).

In spite of the high crime rates, the high levels of fear among white, middle class South Africans cannot be reduced to a logical response to crime alone. By talking about ‘fear of crime plus’, Lemanski (2006) indicates that the drive towards fortified homes, gated communities, secured office complexes and privatized shopping malls is not only motivated by fear of crime, but also by the white, middle class desire to spend time in places where privileged socio-economic positions and white identities are not challenged through uneasy encounters across lines of race and class. As such, not only should the walls, the fences, the cameras and the armed response operators that have come to characterize the post-apartheid urban landscape be seen as a response to the real risk of becoming the victim of crime, but also as a spatial manifestation of the quest for a ‘comfort zone’ in which middle class whites are not disturbed by fear of crime, nor by a wider set of anxieties about their social, cultural and economic position in South Africa (Ballard, 2004; Nahnsen, 2006).

While most studies on the drivers behind enclave urbanism in Cape Town point in the same direction, empirical work on its impact upon interracial and cross-class encounters

comes to more ambiguous and ambivalent conclusions. On one end of the spectrum, anthropologists such as Broadbridge (2001) and Besteman (2008) point at spaces of possibility where deep-rooted racial prejudices and class biases are being challenged. On the other end, Lemanski (2004: 108) argues that wealthy Capetonians increasingly retreat to fortified enclaves which “deepen segregation and reinforce fear by excluding difference and limiting social mixing, thus increasing paranoia and mistrust between groups”.

Similar confusion clouds attempts to evaluate the effects of individual enclaves. Writing about the mass private property of the Victoria and Alfred Waterfront, Ferreira and Visser (2007: 237-8) note that “it has become a “special place” for whites, in a sense, acting as an escape from the realities of a post-apartheid and increasingly Africanizing Cape Town”. Yet, after an in-depth study of the same place, Houssay-Holzschuch and Teppo (2009: 371) infer that one-third of all visitors to the Victoria & Alfred Waterfront belong to the lowest income categories and that it constitutes, therefore, “a remarkable place of ‘togetherness’ in a still segregated metropolis”. A similar debate appears in the literature on city improvement districts. While Samara (2011: 86) indicates that public spaces have been turned into “literal or de facto private, heavily policed enclaves”, Paasche (2012: 46) underlines that “they have become more public than they were before” now that middle class South Africans are less scared to use them.

Against this background, this paper examines where and how white, middle class South Africans interact along lines of race and class in the enclave city of Cape Town. Inspired by Amin's critique of telescopic urbanism, I do not study one particular shopping mall or city improvement district, but focus on interactions across the city. Do white, middle class South Africans lead a telescopic lifestyle in which there is no place for encounters across lines of race and class? Or do such encounters still take place inside and in between different enclaves?

4. Research encounters

To answer these questions, I conducted photo-elicitation interviews with residents of two suburbs of Cape Town in 2007. Whereas Tamboerskloof is a more English speaking, gentrified neighborhood in the City Bowl of Cape Town, Vredeloof is a more Afrikaans speaking neighborhood in the Northern Suburbs of the city (VDK on Fig. 3). Apart from these ethnic and geographical differences, my case study selection strategy was guided by the socio-economic diversity of the inhabitants of both neighborhoods and the presence of community projects to control public space.

For reasons of brevity and clarity, this paper focuses on Vredeloof only. The neighborhood is mostly inhabited by white, middle class South Africans. While only 15.7% of all Capetonians self-identifies as white, and whereas only 25% of all Capetonian households earn more than 12 800 Rand a month (about 1300 euros in 2011), this is the case for as much as 73 and 59% of all residents or households of the ward in which Vredeloof is situated, respectively (City of Cape Town, 2011; Fig. 1). Despite this comparative privilege, there are important socioeconomic disparities in

Vredeloof between the residents of large, single standing units (top of Fig. 2), smaller townhouses (bottom of Fig. 2) and flats in a security complex (middle of Fig. 2).

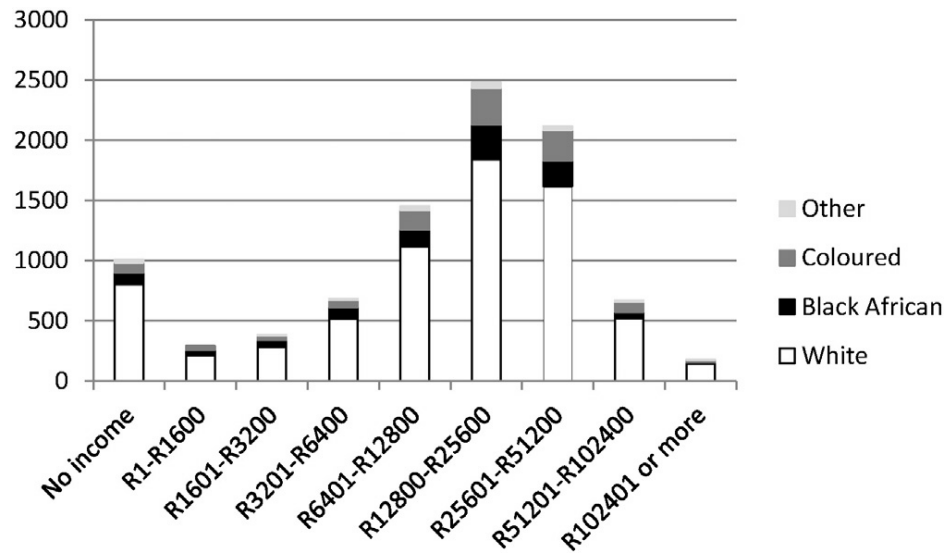


Figure 1 Monthly household income by population group and income category for ward 102, 2011 (City of Cape Town, 2011).



Fig. 2. Different sections of Vredeloof.

Vredeloof is not a gated community. Its perimeter has not been walled and there is no entrance control. Yet, since the establishment of the Vredeloof Safety Council in 2006, there is an aspiration to turn Vredeloof into an enclave. Since 75% of the property owners in Vredeloof voted in favor of the establishment of a city improvement district, all home owners have to pay an additional levy on top of their standard municipal rates (cf. Bénit-Gbaffou et al., 2008). With a total budget of about 200 000 Rand amonth, the management body attempts to keep Vredeloof safe and clean. The committee cuts trees, removes litter and complains about municipal issues such as street lighting and park maintenance. Both during the day and night, an armed response vehicle patrols the neighborhood. A subcontracted security provider also monitors alarms, electrified fences and video streams of residents in a control room. While the eight point plan of the Vredeloof Safety Council expresses the intention “to eventually enclose Vredeloof with electric fencing” and “to put up booms at the two entrances”, this is hard to realize due to legal and financial restrictions.

To find respondents for my study, I posted letters of invitation in every fifth or sixth mailbox. Afterwards, I went from door to door to introduce myself as the researcher who had set up the mail drop. Table 1 summarizes the characteristics of the 36 respondents: their gender (F = female, M = male), their age (2 = between 20 and 29, 3 = between 30 and 39, etc.), their mother tongue and their housing situation (S= smaller, L = larger, O = owner, R = renter, F = flat, H = house, G = gated security complex). The last column gives an indication of the approximate length of the interview (in minutes). The first column assigns each respondent a code which will be used in the remainder of this paper.

All interviews followed the same pattern. First, I asked how fear had changed the do's and don'ts of the respondents in the neighborhood and how they related to their neighbors, homeless people and the Vredeloof Safety Council. In the second part, I used 15 different photographs of shopping malls, recreation facilities, roads and train stations in all corners of the city (e.g. Figs. 4, 5 and 6; see Fig. 3 for a map with the locations of all photographs). Because there was no clear-cut way to interpret them, they evoked a lot of different associations, emotions and thoughts. In fact, they did not only trigger memories of similar situations in comparable places, but also discussions of completely different experiences in distant parts of the city.

All interviews were conducted in the mother tongue of the respondents, either English or Afrikaans. Many interviewees admitted that they had considered my Belgian accent and my appearance in the short encounter on their doorstep. In my view, this strategy was not only meant to curtail criminal threats, but also to confirm that I would be familiar with – and sympathetic to – their way of life. As such, my embodied class position and my visible whiteness were not only implicated in the selection of the respondents, but also in the silenced negotiations about what was desirable, acceptable or politically correct to say.

Code	Gender	Age	Language	Housing	Length
VDK1	M	4	Afrikaans	SHO	90
VDK2	F	3	Afrikaans	LHR	80
VDK3	M	4	Afrikaans	LHO	160
VDK4	M	3	English	SGFR	140
VDK5	M	3	Afrikaans	LHO	80
VDK6a	M	3	Afrikaans	SHO	40
VDK6b	F	3	Afrikaans	SHO	40
VDK7a	M	3	Afrikaans	SHO	80
VDK7b	F	3	Afrikaans	SHO	80
VDK8	M	4	Afrikaans	LHO	90
VDK9	M	5	Afrikaans	LHO	90
VDK10a	F	4	Afrikaans	SHO	90
VDK10b	F	6	Afrikaans	LHO	90
VDK11a	F	4	Afrikaans	LHO	100
VDK11b	F	6	Afrikaans	LHO	100
VDK12	F	6	Afrikaans	SHO	90
VDK13a	M	4	Afrikaans	LHO	60
VDK13b	F	4	Afrikaans	LHO	60
VDK14a	M	4	Afrikaans	LHO	90
VDK14b	F	7	Afrikaans	LHO	90
VDK15	M	4	Afrikaans	LHO	50
VDK16	F	3	Afrikaans	LHO	60
VDK17a	M	3	Afrikaans	LHO	70
VDK17b	F	3	Afrikaans	LHO	70
VDK18	F	4	Afrikaans	SHO	100
VDK19	F	3	Afrikaans	SHO	80
VDK20	M	5	Afrikaans	SGFR	40
VDK21	F	4	Afrikaans	LHO	70
VDK22a	F	3	Afrikaans	SGFR	80
VDK22b	M	3	Afrikaans	SGFR	80
VDK23a	M	4	English	SGFR	50
VDK23b	F	4	English	SGFR	50
VDK24	F	3	Afrikaans	SGFO	90

Table 1 Overview of interviews with Vredeloof residents.

Two coding rounds in NVivo helped me to disentangle the chaotic jumble of interview transcripts into more structured forms of information. In the first round, I collected discourses about the same place under the same code. In the second round, I looked for analytic codes. To increase the credibility of my findings, I triangulated my analysis of the photo-elicitation interviews with an examination of the Vredeloof Safety Council website, email flashes, observations, articles in local newspapers and in-depth

interviews with the local ward councilor, an armed response operator and different board members of the community-run safety council. In 2008, I also returned to Cape Town to conduct 9 member checking interviews.

Below, I organize my arguments in three short empirical sections and a conclusion. The first empirical section will look at interactions taking place inside Vredeloof. Afterwards, I will share my analysis of encounters in shopping malls and in-between different enclaves.



Fig. 3. Location of photographs and other places mentioned in the photo-elicitation interviews.

5. Encounters in Vredeloof

For many Vredeloof residents, the establishment of a safety council was not only necessary to reduce crime, but also to circumvent interactions with vagrants, squatters and homeless people. In the interviews, many indicated that they expected the committee to turn Vredeloof into a neighborhood free of beggars asking for food and homeless people scratching bins:

“I know it's not part of their job, but it's an awful irritation to walk out when litter has been scattered. It feels like your privacy has been violated. People scratch your bins. And I have been waiting to see whether that issue would improve now.”
[VDK18]

The Vredeloof Safety Council also takes active steps to discourage homeless people, beggars and bin scratchers from entering the neighborhood. The patrol guidelines of the armed response company mention, for instance, that it is their function to “restrict unwanted elements from entering Vredeloof” and to “remove all unwanted persons”.

While the document does not specify who these unwanted elements are, it is telling that the local ward councilor argued that homeless people “had stopped coming spontaneously from the moment that our vehicles started to drive” (my emphasis), but that an armed response operator stated that the council had asked him to remove them, even if it was against the law:

“You know, South African law is a strange thing. It tells us we may not actually ask them to leave. They are on a public road, and we can't take them off a public road. The council wants us to remove them. But the moment you touch them, it is assault. The moment you put them in the vehicle, it is kidnapping. (...) We may not technically do that, but eighty per cent of the time we do.” [Armed response operator]

For most respondents, the visible presence of white, colored or black squatters, beggars and homeless people was not so much disturbing because of the crime threat that they posed, but because of the fact that they made them feel uncomfortable about their luxurious lifestyles. In some cases, visible confrontations with poverty even questioned the legitimacy of the huge inequalities in the country and the privileged position therein of people like themselves. As such, the wish to turn Vredenkloof into a ‘safe and clean’ enclave was not only instigated by the hope to reduce the risk to become a victim of crime, but also by the desire to lead a telescopic lifestyle. A female resident told me, for instance, that she “did not like people to look through her garbage” and that “she felt sorry for the people” (VDK2). The chairman of the Vredenkloof Safety Council admitted that “you cannot afford to sleep quietly if your neighbor is hungry”.

Many respondents wanted to do something about the plight of the poor on their doorstep. The resident quoted above said that she “would always give something if they came to ask” (VDK2). Many others packed food leftovers or recyclables in separate bags on garbage day. The Vredenkloof Safety Council discouraged residents to hand out food to the homeless because they were afraid that it would attract even more desperate people, but proposed to collect food in the petrol station and to distribute it through the churches. In Tamboerskloof, the homeowners' association organized a series of street golf tournaments to raise funds for the homeless. With this money, a social worker was employed. She asked the homeless whether they wanted to spend the night in a shelter and checked whether they could use any medical help or skills training (Schuermans & Spocter, 2016).

As such, it is necessary to see the streets, pavements and parks of Vredenkloof simultaneously as places of exclusion and places of encounter (cf. Elwood, Lawson, & Nowak, 2015). On the one hand, the ambition to turn the non-gated suburb of Vredenkloof into a walled or fenced enclave with strong control over public space is motivated by the desire to reduce interactions with underprivileged people. Strategies of displacement and social control are clearly the dominant way to deal with vagrants, beggars and homeless people. On the other hand, daily encounters across lines of race and class can never be avoided altogether. Even though small-scale acts of generosity rarely extend to homeless people elsewhere in the city, encounters in Vredenkloof challenge some privileged residents to reconsider long-standing ways of talking about –

and dealing with – the underprivileged and to stop the dehumanization and criminalization of homeless people and squatters.

6. Encounters in shopping malls

When I showed my respondents a photograph of the Cape Gate shopping mall (Fig. 4), many of them explained that they preferred to shop elsewhere. A father clarified that he preferred his son to go to Tyger Valley mall since it was situated much further away from lower income neighborhoods such as Kraaifontein and informal settlements like Wallacedene and attracted, therefore, a different crowd (VDK9). A woman explained me that “the fact that Cape Gate is closer to Kraaifontein and colored neighborhoods (...) increases the chance of violence” (VDK24). Other people were convinced, however, that both malls were safe from a security point of view, but admitted that they felt more uncomfortable in Cape Gate, nonetheless. In the quote below, a mother and daughter explain that this feelings of discomfort is not caused by fear of crime, but by the presence of “lower league people”. Another resident simply stated that “there is a lot of mix” and that he “could not see this” (VDK5).

- "I don't like Cape Gate. I feel unsafe there. I go there very rarely. (...) If I have to, I will go. But I don't feel comfortable. (...) I won't say Cape Gate is unsafe. I don't know whether it is safe or unsafe. I just say that I don't like the place. I don't feel unsafe. But I don't like the place." (...)

- "Just tell him how we feel about Kraaifontein. (...) We don't like the Kraaifontein area. There always used to be... I won't say poorer, but I don't know how to say it. The extensions here are a higher league and there is a lower league." [VDK10a & VDK10b]



Figure 4. Cape Gate

Based on such statements, it appears to be exaggerated to say that shopping malls act as an escape from the realities of post-apartheid Cape Town (Ferreira & Visser, 2007: 237-8). The fact that middle class, white South Africans retreat into specific shopping malls in light of a desire to minimize exposure to racialized poverty, does not mean that they can avoid encounters with underprivileged people altogether. Even when middle class whites hope to restrict their shopping to malls where they are not confronted with the poverty of their compatriots, their 'telescope' will point at "lower league" people shopping – or window shopping – in the same place.

Nonetheless, it is hard to be jubilant about the kind of 'togetherness' that is created in malls (Houssay-Holzschuch & Teppo, 2009: 351). My respondents in Vredenkloof did not only frequent malls because they considered them to be safer, but also because they would feel "uncomfortable", "different" or "strange" spending money among the "lower league" people in Cape Gate or Voortrekker Road in Bellville. Many respondents admitted, indeed, that they did not only prefer certain malls over others because of pricings, safety measures or driving distances, but also because of the race and class of the clientele. Since the presence of many poorer people would disturb the carefree experience of consumption, a lot of middle class whites looked for malls where they were not outnumbered by people with a lower socio-economic profile. The enclave of the upmarket shopping mall is, therefore, still pivotal in the aspiration to lead a telescopic life.



Fig. 5. Cape Town central railway station.

7. Encounters in between enclaves

When I showed my respondents a photograph of Cape Town's central railway station, (Fig. 5), most admitted that they resorted to their cars for even the shortest distances. The most cited reason to avoid public transport was crime. The chance of becoming the victim of a mugging or robbery was said to be much higher if one mingled with strangers

in packed buses, crammed trains or busy rail stations. A police officer told me that he used to commute by train, but that he would not do so anymore, even though he knew that hundreds of security guards had been employed by the train operator. While most interviewees indicated that class has become an important fault line in post-apartheid South Africa, his discourse shows that racial divisions continue to play an important role:

“The station has changed completely. (...) It has become more of an African station. (...) You get that perception again of being a white man between many blacks or whatever. And I think that's the thing which makes you feel unsafe.”
[VDK9]

Throughout the interviews, it became clear that safety and security are not the only reasons why middle class, white South Africans prefer to avoid trains, buses or shared taxis. Many respondents were also discouraged by the fact that public transport is mostly used by black South Africans who cannot afford a car. Hence, automobility is not only central in the everyday life of my respondents because it enables them to travel conveniently from one enclave to another, but also because it helps them to minimize their confrontations with poor strangers in between enclaves.

Yet, cars do not only consist of metal, but also of glass. Many respondents felt rather uneasy about the fact that it is hard to avoid visual interactions through transparent car windows. A female resident disclosed that beggars at traffic lights made her feel so uncomfortable that she tried to avoid eye contact (VDK7b). Another woman disliked interactions with street vendors:

“I really hate it. They just don't stop. I don't get the feeling that they will steal something from me, but it feels like they are invading my privacy, you see? Here I am in my car. I don't bother anyone.” [VDK21]



Fig. 6. Informal settlements along the N2.

While fear was the dominant emotion behind the steering wheel, it was definitely not the only one. A woman who had experienced a car breakdown on the section of the N2 that passes informal settlements (see Fig. 6) told me that she had been very frightened to be robbed or raped, but that she had also been overwhelmed by the precarious circumstances in which fellow Capetonians are living (VDK24). Especially when she used the N2 on a very rainy day, she felt sorry and ashamed for the fact that children had to grow up like that in Cape Town. A father of three even told me that he expected his son to become aware of the huge gap between rich and poor South Africans by looking out the car window:

“It is part of the upbringing. Because this is an example. Look how these people suffer. My child is getting older now. He will ask me “where is their water? Do they have water? There are no toilets. Where do they go to the toilet?” He is making comparisons now. He can see it with his own eyes. We have three flush toilets at home and they don't have any. (...) So you become socially aware that there are differences. There are poor people and rich people.” [VDK3]

As such, it becomes clear that car travel suffers from a tension between the desirability and the impossibility of telescopic lifestyles. By choosing with whom they travel, car users are able to circumvent physical interactions with poor people in a way that busses, trains or shared taxis would never do. By locking their doors and by rolling up their windows, drivers can opt not to interact with hawkers, beggars and squatters. In part, this explains why cars are preferred over public transportation. Yet, for many respondents, a drive along the informal settlements and townships provided their only experience of such places. My interviews indicated that such visual confrontations with poor strangers could not only bring about fear and indifference, but also initiate new engagements with those they considered to be strangers before. This was especially the case when they were supplemented by face-to-face interactions with domestic workers at home or colleagues at work living under such circumstances (cf. Schuermans, 2013).

8. Discussion and conclusion

The three empirical sections of this paper provide strong evidence that the circumvention of encounters with the poor is an important driver of enclave urbanism in Vredeloof. In line with recent research in India (Fernandes, 2004), China (Pow, 2009) and England (Atkinson & Flint, 2004), my paper demonstrates that many privileged respondents do not only want to retreat into patrolled neighbourhoods, upmarket shopping malls and private transport because they search for security, privacy, status and community, but also because they are attracted to a telescopic lifestyle without unwanted confrontations with squatters or beggars.

Seemingly paradoxically, my research also indicates, however, that the enclave city of Cape Town is much less telescopic than my respondents would like it to be. Even though my interviewees made a lot of effort to retreat in protected enclaves where they did not have to interact with underprivileged people, they never managed to do so completely. At home, nearly all of my respondents employed domestic workers. In their

neighborhood, they were confronted with homeless people, squatters and beggars. In shopping malls, they encountered “lower league” people. On their drives from one enclave to another, they were exposed to squatter settlements.

Hence, the effects of enclave urbanism cannot be deduced from the physical form alone. If Amin (2013a: 484) argues that telescopic urbanism undermines “the politics of shared turf, common interests and mutual obligation”, it cannot automatically be assumed that enclave urbanism does so too. While it is tempting to put a direct link between the spatial lay-out of a city and the veiling of connections, my study suggests that both visual and physical encounters with the racialized poor still do take place inside and in-between different enclaves. Even though many of these encounters are overpowered by feelings of fear and indifference, such encounters can also encourage the privileged residents of a dramatically unequal city such as Cape Town to see the humanity of those whom they had considered to be “different”, “strange” or “lower league” before.

Naturally, these findings need to be considered in light of some limitations of the photo-elicitation technique I deployed. First of all, many encounters discussed in this paper are imaginary or imagined, rather than actual ones. The fact that interactions across lines of race and class are not discussed in the space-time frame where they take place, but in the safety of the home, may distort views (see Wilson, 2011; Yazici, 2013 for an alternative, ethnographical approach which looks at actual journeys and real-time encounters, rather than imagined or recalled ones).

Second, my analysis focuses much more on the (lack of) encounters than on their potential outcomes. If we are interested in the effects of enclave urbanism, it is necessary to investigate how different types of encounters impact upon attitudes, discourses, practices, engagements and alliances with or towards the racialized poor (cf. Lawson & Elwood, 2014). The fact that there is often a gap between values expressed in interviews and actual practices (e.g. Valentine, 2008) necessitates a longitudinal research design in which much more time is spent with each participant.

Third, and closely related to this, it is crucial to combine the perspective of the privileged with that of the underprivileged. As long as we refrain from asking domestic workers, homeless people, squatters, township dwellers or black residents how they experience encounters with privileged whites, there is a serious risk that we confuse charity with solidarity and consider paternalistic acts serving the interests of the privileged to be benevolent for the underprivileged.

Fourth, it needs to be acknowledged that my study is very context-specific. While enclave urbanism entails a radically new urban form in many countries across the world, the South African version builds upon a long history of spatial interventions to ensure the political, cultural and economic dominance of whites. Yet, while the enduring significance of race manifests itself when white people find themselves amidst a majority of colored or black compatriots, encounters across socio-economic lines seemed to be more challenging for many of my respondents than interactions across racial divides. As such, my findings confirm that many middle class Afrikaners have moved away from a

strong racial rhetoric to far more individualized and consumerist self-identities centered around class (Hyslop, 2000).

Obviously, it would be dangerous to generalize such conclusions to other neighborhoods of Cape Town, let alone to other cities in South Africa or to all middle class whites in the country. Afrikaners living in the northern suburbs of Cape Town are considered to be rather different from English speaking, white South Africans living in other parts of the city (cf. Blaser & van der Westhuizen, 2012). In comparison with Cape Town, enclave urbanism is also much more part of the urban landscape in Johannesburg or Durban (Lemanski et al., 2008; Murray, 2011).

Because of the importance of these local specificities, I want to end this paper with a plea to follow up lossifova's (2015) call for more profound, empirical and context-sensitive studies on encounters in enclave cities. Despite the shortcomings mentioned above, my analysis demonstrates that Amin's (2013a) elaborations on telescopic urbanism provide a good starting point to do so. By suggesting that regimes of urban neglect cannot only be shattered by recurring and shared activities, but also by swift and temporary exposure, his metaphor broadens the range of potential encounters to be studied. While it is generally assumed that only long-lasting engagements and activities on equal footing can be meaningful, the discourses of my respondents indicate that the asymmetrical act of watching – and not being watched – may inspire middle class whites to establish visions of a common humanity as well.

Amin's metaphor of telescopic urbanism is also helpful because it urges us to bring the whole city back into view. While much of the scholarship on enclave cities sets its place-based lenses on (the lack of) encounters in residential enclaves, a people-based focus on a multitude of enclaves – and the mobilities in between – shows a different picture. As such, there is an urgent need to overcome both the scalar fetishism and the sedentarist thinking that runs through much of the enclave urbanism literature. Rather than focusing on (the lack of) interactions in gated communities and other residential enclaves, a sound conclusion on the effects of enclave urbanism can only be reached if our telescope gathers light from all kinds of encounter inside and in-between various types of enclaves. As long as we study enclave urbanism telescopically ourselves, we will not be able to grasp the reality and the potential of interracial and cross-class encounters and alliances that may develop inside and in-between enclaves.

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