

The Struggle to Belong: Middle Classing and Social Change in Post-Apartheid South Africa

Vuyiswa Letsoko, Kammila Naidoo, Trynos Gumbo

(Vuyiswa Letsoko, University of Johannesburg, Department of Urban and Regional Planning, Cnr Siemert & Beit Streets, Doorfontein, 0184, Johannesburg, South Africa, 2028, vuyisway@uj.ac.za)
(Prof. Kammila Naidoo, University of Johannesburg, Department of Sociology, 5 Kingsway Ave, Rossmore, Johannesburg, 2092 kammilan@uj.ac.za)
(Prof. Trynos Gumbo, University of Johannesburg, Department of Urban and Regional Planning, Cnr Siemert & Beit Streets, Doorfontein, 0184, Johannesburg, South Africa, 2028, tgumbo@uj.ac.za)

1 ABSTRACT

The social and urban landscape in Johannesburg has been profoundly influenced by its' legacy of colonial and apartheid rule. Apartheid legislation such as the Group Areas Act of 1950 significantly embodied apartheid at an urban scale as it segregated and policed social space on the basis of racial classification where large numbers of people classified as native (also referred to as African, bantu or black), Indian (or Asian) and coloured were relocated to planned settlements to the periphery of cities and leaving the inner city and many areas to the north, east and west as white residential zones. The demise of apartheid and its administration in 1994 has resulted in Johannesburg becoming more racially integrated over time. Conversely, the democratic era has also been associated with a change in the class structure in the country, in particular, the growth of the black middle class. There is no longer always a direct relationship between race and income which means that black, Indian and coloured people are able to live in former white areas and neighbourhoods. Given the rise of crime and violence in the city, residential gated communities have been seen as the common housing option for middle- and upper-class social groups of the country. These developments were initially proliferated by mainly white groups in society, however changes in class dynamics in the country have resulted in growth of the black middle class living within these spaces, therefore creating racially integrated residential pockets in the city. The lived experiences of the black middle class within these spaces, remains under-researched. The study employs a qualitative thematic exploration through the use of in-depth interviews with a group of black middle-class residents residing in two South African residential gated communities in Johannesburg to unpack the politics of belonging to the community and the pressures and complexities of gated living and how that impacts identity formation and self-realisation. The interview data indicated the negative impacts of stereotype threat as black residents live with the historical legacy of being viewed as part of an inferior race. The findings outline various strategies that black residents employ to reaffirm their belonging to the community. Furthermore, the results provide a multi-layered analysis of race, identity, difference, space and place in a post-apartheid urban setting. The study makes recommendation for the decolonisation of privatised residential communities to create more inclusive and cohesive communities.

Keywords: South Africa, class, social change, black middle class, belonging

2 INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXTUALISATION

A central focus of the apartheid state was to cement racial segregation and limit social interaction between racial groups whilst discriminating against non-white groups of society in all spheres - political, social and economic (Lemon, 2021). The Group Areas Act of 1950 significantly embodied apartheid at an urban scale as it segregated and policed social space by “controlling the use, occupation, and ownership of land and buildings on a racial basis, and emphasised separate residential areas, educational services, and other amenities for the different race groups” (Maharaj, 2020:43). Furthermore, it was devoted to imposing control of inter-racial property transactions and occupation with the aim of establishing areas that are exclusively occupied by each racial group (Southall,2022). These processes of controlling the movement and living spaces of Black, Coloured and Indian race groups engendered “mercilessly divided” cities (Seekings, 2000:832) and fragmented racially integrated neighbourhoods in different parts of the country. such as Sophiatown in Johannesburg (see Lodge, 1983); Cato Manor in Durban (see Maharaj, 1994) and District Six in Cape Town (see Hart, 1988 and Western, 1996). This has resulted in a unique and prominent spatial impact on South Africa’s current landscape (Singh and van Eeden, 2017).

The demise of apartheid in 1994, represented a time for change and opportunity, as this transition equally saw a change in the class structure of the country, more particularly the growth of the black middle class (Ballard, 2015). The expansion of the black middle class in the post-apartheid era has been largely attributed

to the enactment of legislation transforming the socio-economic and political landscape and the adoption of affirmative action and black economic empowerment to readdress inequalities resulting from the colonial rule (Khunou, 2015). Furthermore, the de-racialisation of public and private spheres of society such as government, education, the workplace also resulted in racially mixed social spaces and higher upward mobility of historically designated black groups into the middle class (Southall,2022). This upward mobility and new found freedom provided by the democratic era also had significant implications for residential desegregation and diversity as some black middle class took the opportunity to move from the townships to suburbia or former white suburbs – the locus of white power, privilege and status (Ndlovu, 2020; Donaldson, et al 2013).

This trend is also apparent in contemporary developments, residential gated communities which are privatised physical locations whose access is restricted by walls, fences, gates or booms that detach their communities from their surrounds (Liu and Song, 2017). Ballard (2005:2) opines that these developments were initially conceived by the white population as comfort zones in the post-apartheid era “in order to create living environments which would facilitate their modern, European, sense of themselves” that has been lost as a result of democracy and integration. While these were initially conceptualised as white spaces, changes in class dynamics in the country have resulted in growth of the black middle class living within these spaces. therefore creating racially diverse pockets in the city which still remains largely segregated. While research on the black middle class in South African cities is currently on the rise, there remains a gap in literature pertaining to how the black middle-class experience are belonging to contemporary suburbia and what these experiences tell us about social change. The main objective of the study is to address this gap by unpacking the politics of belonging by the black middle class in residential gated communities in Johannesburg suburbs and the pressures and complexities of gated living and how this intersects with black identity formation and self-realisation in the post-apartheid era.

3 LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Conceptualising the black middle class in South Africa

The concept of class has been extensively theorised in social sciences and literature has largely focused on class analysis in western societies. Mercer and Lemanski (2020) indicate that in Europe and America status (income and education) is considered a primary indicator of class rather than income but. given that income and status interconnect, they reveal roughly the same population group. However, Lentz (2017) shows how the inverse is true in the global South, as emphasis on income-based class measures is largely critiqued for ignoring the lived experiences of being middle-class. Historically, Nduna, (2017) highlights that class originated from the industrial revolution in Britain where it was constructed as a social stratum with members falling within a lower, middle and upper class. While the lower class refers to the groups in society that occupy the lowest socioeconomic position and have the least money, the upper class refers to the highest socio-economic members of society who are also the owners of the means of productions, distribution and institutions that enable them to maintain this level of economic control (ibid). The middle class on the other hand has been defined and described in various ways resulting in what Lents (2017:18) terms a ‘conceptual quagmire’.

While there is no global consensus on the definition of the middle class, Mercer and Lemanski (2020) indicate that the dominant definitions of the middle class in the global South have been established by the International Labour Organisation and the African Development Bank where the term is broadly defined as households with a daily per capita consumption of US\$4 to US\$13. While these quantitative measures of class are useful, Melber (2017: 2) opines that they can often be misleading as they suggest that ‘everyone not starving is middle-class’. Other academics have focused their definitions of the middle class on homeownership (Krige, 2015), standard of living (Nhlapho and Anderson,2010), credit worthiness (James, 2015) and political attitudes and position (Southall,2004). From these broad themes derived on how the middle class is defined, one is able to see that the two main indicators of the middle class namely i) wealth and ii) status.

In the Global South, the rise of the “new” black middle class has become a topic of public and scholarly interest (de Coninck, 2018). Black in this context refers to previously disadvantaged groups of society formerly referred to bantu and what the BBBEE refer to as African (Nduna, 2017). Visagie (2013) notes that

the metrics used to identify class in South Africa is occupation, per capita household income, income measures based on lifestyle, and status. Therefore, the terms “black” and “middle class” are merged to form the “black middle class” to refer to the groups in society who were previously disadvantaged and are now liberated to have access to better lifestyle and status. Furthermore, Simpson (2008) explains that this group is also characterised by individuals engaging in white-collar professional jobs given their higher levels of education and skills.

The black middle class in South Africa, is particularly unique due to the intersection of class and race given the country’s history of apartheid that stunted the growth and potential of the African middle class resulting in a polarised and highly unequal country (Zizzamia et al., 2016). Meanwhile white privilege and black deprivation were normalised by colonisation and apartheid, black upward mobility inverts apartheid’s intended social hierarchy (Ballard, 2015). In fact, the nickname adopted by media to refer to this group was “black diamonds” suggesting that their emergence was considered rare and unusual. However, this group has since experienced considerable growth since the end of apartheid. This can be seen in the table below based on a report released by Unilever in 2016 that indicated that there were approximately 5.81 million black middle-class individuals in South Africa (BusinessTech, 2016).

Year	Number in Millions
2004	1.74
2008	2.67
2012	4.22
2014	5.33
2016	5.61

Table 1: Black Middle Class in South Africa 2004 – 2016. Source: BusinessTech, (2016)

One of the challenges in literature concerning the black middle class is that in some instances, certain individuals have a challenge with self-identifying as a black middle-class individual resulting in an over-reliance on statistical data in capturing the black middle-class experience. Khunou and Krige (2013) highlight that in South Africa there is an overlap in race, class, gender and life trajectories which are key determinants of whether an individual self-identifies as being black and middle class or not. They further suggest that racial economic differences, white middle-class exclusionary practices, and the resistance to “market labels” had an impact on whether the term was considered acceptable to them or not. Studies in the UK and USA also found that self-identifying and middle class is a complex process and has been met with contestations from black people for various reasons (Maylor and Williams, 2011; Rollock et al., 2011; Thomas, 2015). This indicates that there is actually no single way to be considered black and middle class.

3.2 Race, class and belonging in Johannesburg: from residential segregation to integration

The City of Johannesburg is often termed a dual-city given its high levels of inequality. A key contributor to this inequality is the legacy of apartheid planning which legitimised exclusionary practices through the use of artificial and unnatural growth patterns that led to the manifestation of a fragmented urban form in South African cities (Harrison & Williamson, 2001). During the high apartheid era (1948-1978), buffer zones such as highways, railway lines, open spaces and servitudes were used to cement racial and spatial divisions in South African cities (Spoceter, 2021). The Group Areas Act (Act 41 of 1950) was one of the key instruments that were used to reinforce this apartheid ideology and gave rise to the apartheid spatial form depicted in the Fig. 1.

The figure below presents the widely cited spatial model of the apartheid city which was developed by Davis (1981) that indicates the spatial implementation of the group areas principles. The description of the apartheid city model is well captured by Lemanski, Landman and Durlington (2008:141):

“The city was exclusively White, with blacks considered ‘temporary sojourners’. Black Africans, Coloureds and Indians were forced to settle in or were relocated to ‘townships’ on the urban periphery. The [apartheid] government produced rows of identical (‘matchbox’) houses in these dormitory areas, rarely accompanied by adequate engineering services, social infrastructure or parks and open spaces.”

The apartheid city was systematised in such a way that non-white areas were denuded of facilities, adequate basic services, and employment opportunities. Non-whites could only enter “white group areas” as workers, servants, or consumers and passed laws were implemented as a form of social control and to regulate the level of access allowed by these groups in society (Morris, 2004). The Group Areas Act (Act 41 of 1950) dismantled racially integrated spaces in Johannesburg such as Sophia town and uprooted people and their

families from their homes to poorly built and under-serviced townships (Maharaj, 2020). In 1994 when the country gained democracy, there were a number of transformations that impacted on the socio-spatial structure of the city. For instance, while affluent former white only suburbs, for the most part, retained their privileged socio-spatial and economic status as they experienced massive investments in infrastructure developments post-1994 such as new residential areas, malls, and commercial complexes etc. Butcher (2021) notes that residential de-racialisation through such market force developments from the early 1990s have been key drivers of the social geography in Johannesburg. These spaces also saw changes in their demographics as the demise of the Group Areas Act and other influx control laws resulted in greater mobility and residential desegregation for people of colour. They were no longer bound by their ‘racial zones’ and had greater choice of their residential location (Spocter, 2021). This led to the movement of black middle-upper-classes to formerly white only residential areas (Donaldson, et al, 2013). Ballard (2005) explains that the acceptance of other ‘races’ into these former white areas was however conditional and the black middle class found themselves needing to assimilate and adapt to the culture, norms and standards that were practised by the ‘host’ white group.

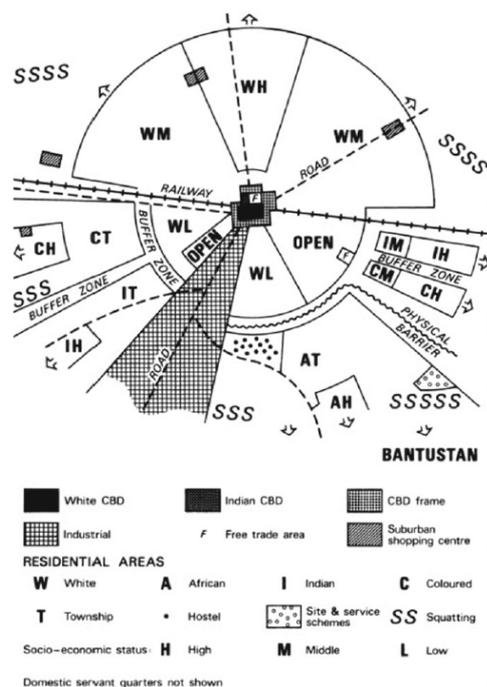


Fig. 1: Apartheid City Model. Source Davies (1981)

One of the core objectives of the democratic government has also been to integrate communities to undo the spatial injustices of apartheid. Seekings (2008) explained that integration in the post-apartheid is taking place mainly in state-driven low-income projects, apartment blocks or voluntary integration in new private housing areas. Similarly, residential gated communities have become a key characteristic of the post-apartheid suburb and while they were initially conceptualised as home only for the white elite in society, they too are starting to become diverse and racially integrated (Ballard, Jones and Ngwenya, 2021). This indicated the potential for these spaces to promote integration in the city and also serve as vessels which are semi-open borders of interaction between different social groups and communities (Salcedo and Torres, 2004). Not only does this produce new communities but also platforms for new forms of conflicts and politics of belonging in the city. The concept of belonging has recently emerged as a critical issue confronting contemporary society (Yuval-Davis, 2015). Due to the multidimensional nature of the concept and its application in various fields (e.g. politics, sociology and psychology) it is problematically broad and this also means that finding a single definition for the concept proves to be challenging. Ujang and Zakariya, (2015) highlight that the concept is also used interchangeably with the concepts of rootedness and sense of place and is generally understood as a human need that promotes a relationship, ability to shape identity, recognition, acceptance and attachment with someone or something. This definition of belonging is best suited in the context of the study in that it draws on the consciousness around a person’s relationship to a community and facilitate an individual or collective ability to gauge how and why one differs from others. Here, one is able to assess how the black

middle class navigate difference in their individual and collective ability and how this impacts on their belonging in the community. Khaile, Roman and Davids (2020) explain that belonging has various social benefits. Not only is it closely linked to social cohesion but it elevates social relations, recognition and attachment that can assist in “developing a view of oneself to space and others and having the ability to claim or resist exclusion” (ibid,2020:60). They also explain that belonging is a necessary imperative and requirement of nation building (ibid, 2020). This was also evident in the South African Cities Network report that explained that “all citizens must have a sense of belonging spatially, socio-culturally and economically to our cities and cities were expected to enhance this sense of belonging through making and managing spaces and places that people can identify strongly with and frequent freely, without fear of intimidation or being unwelcomed – this is the way of the inclusive city” (2016:127).

4 METHODOLOGY

The research forms part of the findings of a larger PhD study concerning social interactions within residential gated communities in Johannesburg in the post-apartheid era. By critically focusing on the lived experiences of residents of gated communities, this study adopts a phenomenological approach to understand black middle class resident’s perceptions and experiences of belonging in a residential gated community. At its most basic, phenomenology can be defined as an “approach to research that seeks to describe the essence of a phenomenon by exploring it from the perspective of those who have experienced it” (Neubauer, Witkop and Varpio, 2019:91). The research is designed as a qualitative study. This approach is best suited for the study as it enables the researcher to delve into the lived experiences of individuals, exploring certain feelings and emotions that are difficult to quantify (Creswell,2007). It employed in-depth semi structured interviews with eight black middle-class residents residing in two residential gated communities in Greenstone Hill, Johannesburg and sampled using purposive and snowball sampling techniques. The locality of these two residential gated communities that were the focus of the study are depicted in the figure below (shaded in red and yellow).

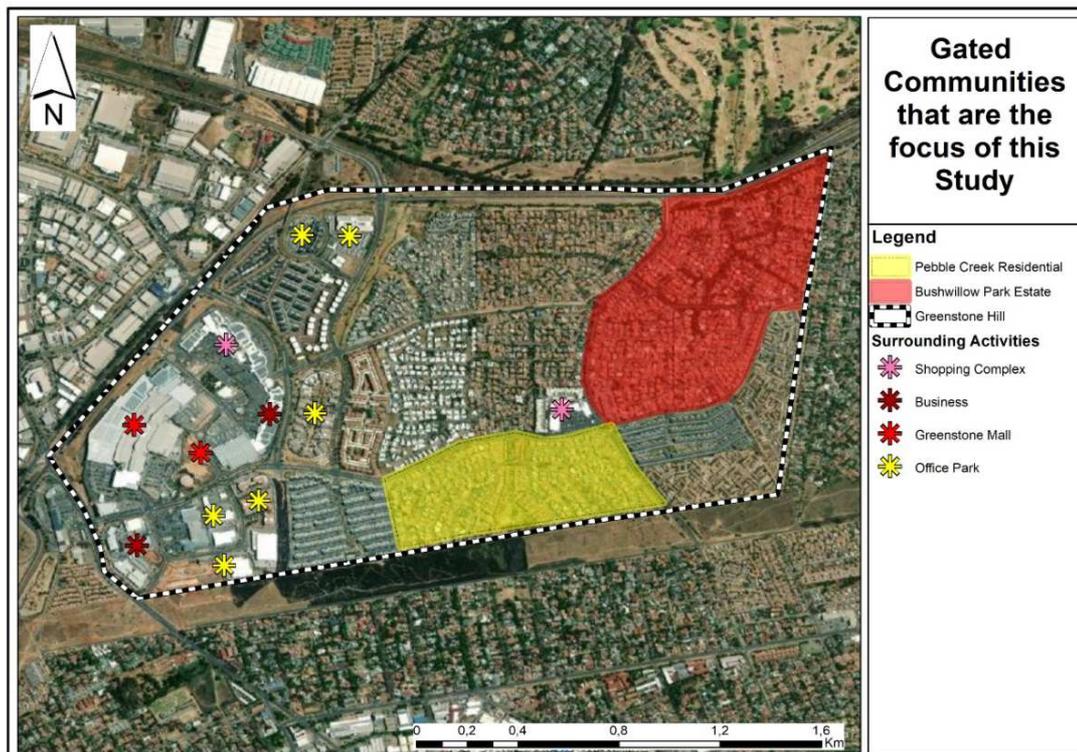


Fig. 2: Residential gated communities’ locality

Greenstone Hill is a predominantly residential suburb located in the north-east of the City of Johannesburg within Region E. Although the history of this residential suburb is not well documented, it is relatively new and was initially a green field belt which transformed into the spatial expressions of privately driven city building. The area is commonly referred to as Greenstone and is made up of secured business parks, warehouse complexes, shopping malls, townhouse complexes and gated residential communities with free-

standing houses. Property24 (2021) reported that the property prices for sectional title schemes and houses sold in the area ranged between R1 592 500 - R3 150 000 in 2020/2021. The majority of the buyers, sellers and owners fall within an age group range between 18 – 49 years which means the area is a relatively young area.

5 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Neighbourly relations in the post-apartheid era are both complex and fragile. This is especially the case given the country's legacy of segregation where social mixing of different races and ethnicities were almost non-existent just twenty-eight years ago and the knowledge and familiarity on these lines are still weak and at times often based on the experiences of someone else. This is partly due to the persistence of mono-racial, mono-ethnic, and mono-cultural neighbourhoods that continue to define the socio-spatial dynamics of cities. Racial integration processes and urban transformations stemming from desegregation in the post-apartheid era brought with it feelings of uneasiness and uncertainty. Whilst the discussions in the literature review have shown how residential gated communities provide platforms for diverse everyday entanglements (of race, class, gender, nationalities, cultures etc.), the “other” is still unfamiliar and is filled with potentially misleading images resulting in heightened intergroup social anxieties and reduced sense of belonging. The discussions below present the key findings of the study based on the results of the data emanating from the interviews.

5.1 Self-identifying as black and middle class

A widespread notion in literature as well as in the slogans and images of advertisements relating to gated communities is the presentation of spaces that provide an exclusive lifestyle and private environment (Farid and Ahmed, 2018). An observation that was made during the collection of the data was that most of the residents self-identified as being black and middle class and this was mainly driven by their level of education, prosperity in their jobs and their ability to afford the lifestyle that a residential gated community provides. There was a general sense from the interviews that the pride of residing in a gated community coincided with status, wealth and class.

“Living in a gated community has that status to it right...as well as a better life for your family. I grew up in the rural side of Limpopo, Ga-Marishane to be precise and living here and the life I grew up in is completely different and yes it does give you that sense that you have made it, that you are taking up space but this is really just the start...ultimately I'd like to build a home in Dainfern or Serengethi which provides more space.”

The above coincides with one of the main reasons behind the choice to move into a residential gated community while the other key issue was the concerns relating to crime but also to ensure that there is a sense of investment and legacy that is left for their children. Here, we also see the impacts of the apartheid legacy and how this has impacted on the life choices that have led to many of the black middle-class groups in the country move to residential spaces that represent opportunity and how the township is never regarded as such a space. From an identity perspective, one of the participants indicated that the label of black middle class was unnecessary and used to further cause divisions in the country. She explained the following

“What is the obsession with racial classifications in the country? I believe that more than anything it causes more divisions. I mean could we not just be considered as middle class, why do we have to term it as black middle class and white middle class? That draws lines between social groups that we are trying to unite as a country in a post-apartheid era. The middle-class experiences are the same in my opinion regardless of race.”

The above further indicates the challenges with conceptualising the middle class and more especially the black middle class and how this differs to white middle class experiences. The participants' view above are in contrast with another participant who believes the differences of the black middle class may not be largely different from an economic perspective, however from a social perspective he believes that unlike the white middle class, black middle class individuals continually find themselves at “a constant battle of defining our space and validating our existence and my reason for being and demonstrating that I had earned my space”(participant). This also aligns to Fanon's (1986:25) views that despite black peoples achievements and the wearing of European clothes,... using European furniture and European forms of social intercourse;... using bombastic phrases in speaking or writing the European language ...', to achieve a sense of equality, he remains 'barred from all participation in a white world'. This suggests that the experience of the black

middle class cannot merely be equal to that of the white middle class and vice versa. Moreso, Moore (2008) observed that many of the first generation black middle-class often have lower-class relatives who are relying on them for help which further complicates the experiences of a black middle class resident. In fact, many of the participants indicated that the recent economic challenges facing the country as a result of Covid, have placed additional pressures on their ability to retain their middle class status. These sentiments are apparent in the participant's views below:

‘While I do agree to a certain extent that I and my family are considered to be a middle class family, situations in the country are really quite bleak so while I can afford the lifestyle of living in a gated community and afford my family this type of quality of life and you know sense of peace...the flip side of that is that many of us here, especially after Covid are starting to really feel the pinch and find ourselves going deeper and deeper into loans and stuff just to keep up with the middle class lifestyle...living in an estate is expensive, there are rates, taxes and levies which need to be paid so it is tough to keep at it while also looking after your family back home [outside the gated community].’

5.2 Stereotype threat and navigating belonging

Belonging as expressed by the participants was identified as a feeling (attitude and behaviour) as well as a state of being (experienced in connection to others in the community). While these were largely based on personal experiences they were also connected to their experiences towards the community. One participant described the social aspect of belonging as being closely related to their ability to feel that they are not judged and are considered an ordinary member of the community, like other residents from other races. This however was not the case as there was a general sense of detachment and avoidance regarding the broader community by the black residents and a skewed sense of belonging not only to the community but to the space of the gated community. Some of the avoidance of interaction and getting involved can be traced to the preconceptions that black people have of what others think of them. Pettigrew (2010) talks about the stereotype threat, which is triggered by the awareness and attention that others view your group as inadequate. The belief that some people are still thinking that they are better than black people, because they were taught that way during apartheid, divides people. The inherited memories of the time when black populations were not allowed in certain urban areas, has left a strong imprint in people's minds. The non-belonging of black people emerged in both the self-reflective notions of black African residents. This is present in the interview excerpts below:

“Estates were never made for black people, so it makes sense why we will feel like we are out of place“

“Home” is back home in Hammanskraal [a township in the North of the City of Tshwane], I struggle to consider this as home and you see this with other black people who will say ke ya hae over the festive season, December comes and it is quiet in Joburg...white people have gone on holiday and blacks have gone back home... this is not where your family is...family is in the townships and the rural areas for us blacks.“

Additionally, conversations with the black participants in the study indicated that some of the black residents in this study live with the historical legacy of being viewed as part of an inferior race. Maldonado-Torres (2016) called this the “zone of non-being” where he conceptualises the zone of blackness as the zone of damnation, suggesting that in historically racist contexts, to be Black is to be seen as cursed and damned. But, the form of how this works goes further than this. Black subjectivity is located within the tension between the “desire” to be White (regarded as human) and complete resignation because “the hell of coloniality is that of self-erasure: blackness must disappear or at least be covered-over by whiteness” (2016). One of the participants expressed the following in relation to this:

“You are not able to fully express yourself as a black person in a gated community for fear of being told that you are too loud or that you are being too ghetto or black...so one needs to adopt a different type of behaviour, like a white behaviour...unlike when you are in the township...when I enter the gates of the estate I immediately just lower down the volume on my radio, pull up the windows, you know act civil...this is very different from the township, I mean when you approach the township already you have your music blasting really loud...you roll down the windows because you are almost certain that on your drive home you will bump into someone and have a brief conversation, or just greet people man“.

The above excerpts briefly compare the lived experiences of the township versus life in a gated community. Unlike much of the research that paints the township as a negative and crime-ridden space, these sentiments

shed some light on the positive memories and experiences expressed by some participants in the study. The township is depicted as a friendly space with a sense of connection in contrast to the individualistic nature of the gated community. The above also indicates that black residents use assimilation and adaptation strategies to conform to the norms of gated living, even though this might have a negative impact on how they experience their communities. While residing in a gated community was a choice that all the black residents interviewed made for themselves, they also indicated how moving back to the township was not an issue given the lack of investment and infrastructure in the township communities. Furthermore, the township was commonly seen as an undeveloped space that leaves very little desire and retention of the black middle class. This was captured in the interview excerpts below:

I could never see myself moving back to the township...the moment most black people make it and earn a decent income, one automatically thinks of moving out...the government also has failed those spaces but it is also because the township was never made to shine, it is just the social engineering of apartheid and the legacy it has left...there are no good schools, places of recreation especially for kids. The government just deserted those space and I see it every time I go to Katlehong and that also makes one feel a bit sad and guilty because your community is suffering. yet you are living on the brighter side of life...poverty has trapped a lot of people in the township and I think the advantage of mobility is one of the biggest advantages for black middle class families in times of today... this also makes it very hard for a black prosperous person to actually belong anywhere in the city... the townships are underdeveloped and the suburbs do not fully cater for the black experience, so where do we belong actually or find that sense of belonging?

The above dialogue highlights a certain level of guilt that some residents have about having access to such a lifestyle in comparison to the majority of the individuals who are adversely affected by socio-economic inequalities in the country. Furthermore, the above also indicates the rationale behind the middle class deciding to leave the township space. Donaldson, et al, (2013) however indicate that there are some black middle class residents that decide to stay in the township regardless of their economic mobility. They explained that in their study more than half (53 per cent) of the black middle class residents in their sample of 180 participants remained residents of the township, compared with only 32 per cent who had moved to former whites-only suburbs. This observation also raises the following question, which is why do some of the black middle class not leave townships and what are those who do escaping? Donaldson, et al, (2013) explains that this is due to the perception that there is no ubuntu where a black person is likely to be considered an “outcast” (Ndlovu, 2020) within the suburban context which therefore will also have negative impacts on belonging. However, the sad reality is that the township spaces still remain largely untransformed. In fact residential desegregation is more prominent in the former white only residential areas and the same cannot be said about the township space which remains predominately black. Posel (2010: 160) terms this ‘racially politicised consumption’ that has resulted in the reinforcement of regimes of belonging – black people only belonging to the township, white people belonging to the suburb. Ndlovu (2020:575) explains that this is unsurprising though as townships were socially engineered as a zone to limit and cripple the rights of blacks to own land or homes and therefore the township in the post-apartheid, “emerges as a place set up to prove that, since all black people are poor, nothing should suggest the contrary”.

5.3 Navigating a double consciousness: privilege, identity, and culture

For many of the participants the gated community is considered “for whites only” even if the demographic reality showed differently. Even though black respondents did not give harsh labels or stereotyping attributes to non-black residents the same way as the other race groups did of the them, the prejudice towards non-black groups was very much present. It just took a different verbal form. The gated community, therefore, becomes a stage for the Black middle class where “whiteness” is performed, and Black identity redefined for civility to prevail. “Whiteness” in the narrative above is positioned as individualistic, unfriendly, and non-social. Furthermore, the gated community was perceived as both an opportunity and challenge. Many of the Black residents expressed a sense of guilt for living a lifestyle that was quite different to back ‘home’. One participant conveyed the following sentiments:

“I don’t know but there seems to be this thing ko kasi [in the township] that if you live in a white space, you have made it and stuff...people even sometimes think you are now less of a black person just because you stay in the suburbs or they make funny comments about you, that you are better than them...people will say you are lucky and stuff but like...I have worked hard for my family to build a home and stay here, it didn’t

come easy and definitely was not cheap but also you have that sense of guilt...a lot of people back home are still struggling and here you are sitting in all this privilege so it is sometimes a hard pill to swallow.”

The above sentiments links to Du Bois’ (1982) theory of ‘double consciousness’ that is employed as a coping mechanism for black people living in a pluralistic society and find themselves being members of two different communities resulting in feeling pressured to adhere to both sets of standards and evaluating oneself on the basis of others’ perceptions. A common statement among black residents is that that they do not consider the gated community as their home. Home connotes safety and familiarity. The search and longing for home has become pressing in an age of global uncertainty, profound change and displacement. As Duyvendak (2011) argues, the world is increasingly homesick (for the places of origin) and nostalgic (for the ‘good old days’). Home, therefore, reflects a desire to stabilise the disruptions of identity arising from the loss of place (Woodward, 2002). In a world we experience as increasingly alienating, it offers the promise of return, unity, fullness and stability (Brickell, 2012; Nichols, 2008). It is through the trope of home that articulations of belonging come to be figured (Yuval-Davis, 2006). The simplicity of the statement, ‘I belong here’ evokes an intuitive knowing that often requires little interrogation to understand its meaning (Antonsich, 2010). Belonging for the black resident was in the townships and rural settings, where black residents felt their culture and traditions were best understood. For instance, one of the participants explains this in the context of the custom of slaughtering which was considered unsuitable in the gated community:

“Just try slaughter a goat here and you will see the backlash you will get...that is what I mean when I say the space is not for Africans...How can I say I belong here if my cultural and traditional practices are frowned upon? Like for me it makes no sense why we are not able to slaughter here, I am a homeowner, I have the space in my home but I still can’t slaughter...my concern really is that although we have homesteads back in the rural or township spaces where we practice our culture freely, what about our kids?...Black culture and traditions are fading because of such spaces or maybe it’s a way to keep us out? Who knows?” (Participant)

As Ballard (2010) has analysed, slaughtering in the suburbs has caused contradictions between the African heritage and the white culture. The established middle class has condemned the custom, especially in the suburban areas, while black African people have seen it as their right to express their culture, and thus an entitlement of full citizenship and the free use of space. Furthermore, the above narrative also exposes a relationship between the resident, the gated community and the rural / township setting and further reveals why the gated community could be a conflicting environment for a black resident. While the township and the rural spaces were considered home for the black residents, these spaces were also considered “unprogressive” and “non-developmental” whilst the gated community presented spaces of opportunity and status. Conversely, the rules that are set in these communities can also be limiting and do not consider the diversity of the country to cater for the transformation and decolonisation of spaces within the city. One of the participants in the study also indicated how he believed that the gated community was providing a fake experience of the country and how this also has the potential to negatively impact on black identity formation in the post-apartheid era. He explains this in the following way

My concern really is, and I am not quite sure how this can be remedied considering the high numbers of people migrating to cities on a daily basis, that these estates are not only giving our kids a false sense of the world and of South Africa, but they also have negative prospects for young boys and how they form their identity in the suburbs as a black African child to learn isintu [tradition]...as time goes by our traditions and our cultures will be neutralised and diminished because urban spaces have no place for them...our kids’ black identity is at threat, it has already started with the languages. In the home most kids only know English and not their mother tongue...so it remains important to plug these kids in and out of the rural and township space so they can know their roots.

The above also indicates the role of the township and rural spaces to realign one’s blackness. This observation was also made by Chevailer (2015) who explained that black suburban middle class frequent the township for everyday activities, such as getting their hair done, going to a braai or socialising. One participant indicated that these trips have a deeper meaning in that they are a way in which they “reconnect with my people” but also to “fulfil my needs since the businesses and the salons here cater largely for white people, so I drive to Soweto every month end to get my hair done...also I feel like I can be myself, speak my language and be around people who I grew up with and understand”.

6 CONCLUSION

This paper gave an insight into the dynamics of belonging for black middle-class residents in two residential gated communities in Greenstone Hill, Johannesburg. The study revealed that moving to former white urban spaces in the post-apartheid era is considered a symbol of increased social status, therefore contributing to how the black groups in society who have been able to reap the benefits of upward mobility self-identify as being black and middle class. There is also a consensus that while the term black middle class is challenging to define, it is approached in various ways but the lifestyle and ability to afford life within a gated estate is one of the key determinants of this social class according to the participants in the study. While these spaces, present opportunity for the black middle class, in comparison to the township and rural space, which are considered as forgotten spaces given the lack of government intervention and investment, there are also some considerable limitations that meet the black suburban middle class. These include their inability to practise their traditions and cultures freely, stereotypical views of non-black neighbours and performativity to assimilate and adapt to the rules and behaviours of these residential spaces that may be based on individualistic and westernised ideals of community.

7 REFERENCES

- Ballard, R (2005) Bunkers for the Psyche: How Gated Communities have Allowed the Privatization of Apartheid in Democratic South Africa. Dark Roast Occasional Paper Series No 24. Cape Town: Isandla Institute.
- Ballard, R. (2015) 'Black Middle Class in South Africa ("Black Diamonds")' in John Stone, Routledge Dennis, Polly Rizova, Anthony Smith, and Xiaoshuo Hou (eds) *The Wiley Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Race Ethnicity and Nationalism*. John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.
- BusinessTech, (2016). This is what it means to be middle class in South Africa. 11 September 2016. Retrieved from: <https://businesstech.co.za/news/business/134749/black-vs-whitemiddle-class-in-south-africa/>.
- Butcher, S.(2021). New Ward for a New Johannesburg? Reformatting Belonging and Boundaries in the City's South. *Urban Forum*,32:183–204.
- Chevalier, S. (2015) 'Food, malls and the politics of consumption: South Africa's new middle class', *Development Southern Africa* 32 (1): 118–29.
- Canham, H., & Williams, R. (2017). Being Black, Middle Class and the Object of Two Gazes. *Ethnicities*, vol. 17, no. 1, pp. 23–46. JSTOR, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26413933>.
- Davies, R. J. (1981). The Spatial Formation of the South African City. *GeoJournal*, 1981, pp. 59–72. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/45185147>.
- Donaldson, R., T. Mehlomakhulu, D. Darkey, M. Dyssel and P. Siyongwana (2013) 'Relocation: to be or not to be a black diamond in a South African township?', *Habitat International* 39: 114–18.
- Fanon F (1986) *Black Skin White Masks*. New York: Grove Press.
- James, D. (2015) *Money from Nothing: indebtedness and aspiration in South Africa*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press.
- Khaile, T., Roman, N. V., & Davids, G. J. (2020). Possible effects of spatial injustice on the sense of Belonging of black communities' in south African. *Metros: a review of literature. Journal of Culture, Society and Development*, Vol.62.
- Khunou G and Krige D (2013) Comment & Analysis: Why is it hard to be black and 'middle class'? *Mail & Guardian*, November 8–14, 27.
- Krige, D. (2015) "'Growing up" and "moving up": metaphors that legitimise upward social mobility in Soweto', *Development Southern Africa* 32 (1): 104–17.
- Lemanski, C., Landman, K., & Durlington, M. (2008). Divergent and similar experiences of 'gating' in South Africa: Johannesburg, Durban and Cape Town. *Urban Forum*, 19, 133–158.
- Lentz, C. (2017) 'African middle classes: lessons from transnational studies and a research agenda' in H. Melber (ed.), *The Rise of Africa's Middle Class: myths, realities and critical engagements*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press
- Maylor U and Williams K (2011) Challenges in theorising 'Black middle-class' women: Education, experience and authenticity. *Gender and Education* 23(3): 345–356.
- Melber, H. (2017) "'Somewhere above poor but below rich": explorations into the species of the African middle class(es)' in H. Melber (ed.), *The Rise of Africa's Middle Class: myths, realities and critical engagements*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press.
- Mercer, C. & Lemanski, C. (2020). The lived experiences of the African middle classes Introduction. *Africa*, 90 (3) 2020: 429–38.
- Moore KS (2008) Class formations. Competing forms of black middle-class identity. *Ethnicities* 8(4): 492–517.
- Ndlovu, T. (2020). Shuttling between the suburbs and the township: the new black middle class(es) negotiating class and post-apartheid blackness in South Africa. *Africa*, 90, (3), 568–86.
- Nduna, N. T. (2017). Black middle-class tourists' segment in South Africa: a critical analysis. *African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure*, Volume 6 (4).
- Neubauer, B. E., Witkop, C. T., Varpio, L. (2019). How phenomenology can help us learn from the experiences of others. *Perspect Med Educ*. 8(2):90-97. doi: 10.1007/s40037-019-0509-2.
- Nhlapo, M. S., & Anderson, B. A. (2010). Profiling South African middle class households: 1998e2006. Pretoria: Statistics SA. [www.statssa.gov.za/publications/ Report-03./Report-03-03-01.pdf](http://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/Report-03./Report-03-03-01.pdf)
- Rollock N, Gillborn D, Vincent C, et al. (2011) The public identities of the black middle classes: Managing race in public spaces. *Sociology* 45(6): 1078–1093.
- Simpson, J. B. (2008). Black diamonds: the new South African middle class. *Management Today*, 24(4), 43e46.
- Spocter, M. A. (2021). Comparison of Security in City and Small-Town Gated Developments in the Western Cape province, South Africa. *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, vol57(2):165-181.

- Southall,R.(2022): The middle class and suburbia: desegregation towards non-racialism in South Africa?, *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*.
- South African Cities Network; Johannesburg Development Agency. (2014). *Spatial Transformation of Cities: Conference Report*.
- Southall, R. (2004) 'Political change and the black middle class in democratic South Africa', *Canadian Journal of African Studies / La Revue Canadienne des Études Africaines* 38 (3): 521–42.
- Thomas CS (2015) A new look at the black middle class: Research trends and challenges. *Sociological Focus* 48(3): 191–207.
- Zizzamia, R., Schotte, S., Leibbrandt, M. & Ranchhod, V. 2016. Vulnerability and the middle class in South Africa. (Southern Africa Labour and Development Research Unit Working paper 188). Cape Town, University of Cape Town.