Navigating Belonging?
Entangled Spaces, Entangled Lives in Alexandra Township

The Chicago scholar, Robert Ezra Park, once argued: "The processes of segregation establish moral distances which make the city a mosaic of little worlds which touch but do not interpenetrate" (Park 1915: 608). This famous, yet problematic quote is symptomatic of what I call *mosaic thinking*, a way of understanding the relation between people and spaces that haunts much research and many theories on neighbourhoods and cities. Mosaic thinking understands the city as made up of distinct patches (neighbourhoods), each with its colour (identity) and clearly drawn boundaries. Mosaic thinking equalises neighbourhoods with specific social categories or identities, it overemphasises the power of spatial boundaries and it pays no attention to the way the different spaces and lifeworlds are connected in everyday life. What I will argue in this chapter, though, is that neighbourhoods need to be understood in relation to other urban areas and the city at large, and not in isolation. Neighbourhoods are always entangled with other places, and they become constituted through these connections. What the chapter also wants to challenge is representations of such neighbourhoods as homogenously poor and disconnected slums.

Neighbourhoods need to be understood as very diverse places. One has to very carefully disentangle neighbourhoods as social spaces from assumptions about their internal social life. In Alexandra, which this chapter focuses on, the notion of community is central to local politics, and dense social networks indeed exist within yards and across yards. But at the same time, it is also a neighbourhood deeply divided by shifting internal boundaries as well as characterised by anonymity and the difficult conviviality of clashing lifestyles. There is great variety in what the neighbourhood as a social space means in the everyday lives of my informants. Defining neighbourhoods as communities has remained popular in geography where they are often defined as having a cohesive sense of identity, a political or social organisation (Konings, Van Dijk and Foeken 2006: 1). Such definitions are highly problematic as neighbourhoods can be anything from administrative boundaries existing only on bureaucrats' maps to anonymous sleeping places to the sources of identity and the horizon of everyday life. Meanings of neighbourhoods and the relevance of spatial boundaries in everyday life have to be researched and not pre-assumed.

Most of the research on Alexandra is in line with a vast strand of research that treats Johannesburg as a 'problem to be solved', looking at segregation, poverty, inequality and social justice (Beall et al. 2002, Bond 2000, Harrison, Huchzermeyer

and Mayekiso 2003).[1] Mbembe and Nuttall (2008: 13) criticise the fact that many township studies pay little attention to the imbrications of city and township. Recent ethnographies on townships, for example by Harber (2011) on Diepsloot or by Bank (2011) on East London, have similarities with American community studies (e. g. Gans 1962, Hannerz 2004 [1969]) in the sense that the overall city just lurks in the background. There is little research which looks at suburban and township spaces within the same analytical frame. This bifurcation of research practice contributes to reproducing the image of South Africa as a bifurcated society with dual cities and downplays the deep connections between different social spaces and social milieus. As this chapter will show, Alexandra has always been and still is tightly integrated and interdependent with the surrounding city. It is embedded in complex social, cultural and economic entanglements with the surrounding suburbs, as well as with other cities and far off rural homes in South Africa and other countries. Based on the ethnography of everyday spaces in Alexandra, the chapter seeks to rethink the category of neighbourhood in the relation to the city. The city is not a "collection of independent realms" but a "series of interconnected spaces and processes" (Srivastava 2014: xx). Moving beyond the city as 'a mosaic of little worlds', Johannesburg emerges as a city produced in the links, connections and relationships between worlds within and across neighbourhoods.

Alexandra Collectively Imagined: Narratives and Histories

The history of Alexandra has been documented meticulously by two historians, Noor Nieftagodien and the late Phil Bonner, in *Alexandra: A history* (Bonner and Nieftagodien 2008). History, or rather memory, is very important if not constitutive for many urban milieus in the township. Memories shape the popular imaginations and identities of what 'Alex', which is what the locals call it, is; five of these important narratives (there are many others) are worth mentioning, as they profoundly shape the way Alexandra's residents talk and feel about the township. *Alexandra* becomes constituted simultaneously and contradictorily by the following diverse narratives, meanings and imaginations.

A 70-year-old descendant of what once used to be property owners (see below) and a well-known 'community leader' said to me in a conversation: "We CAN build Alexandra, we CAN change Alexandra (February 2011).[2] In this quote, the 'we' refers to an emic notion of 'community' which residents often invoke. The question of who is considered a legitimate member of this 'we' has been a key contentious issue in township politics across the decades. The following five modes of narrating this 'we' and narrating Alex-

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1 Research on Alexandra covers local political struggle history (Bozzoli 2010, Lucas 1995), housing (Charlton 2010, Huchzermeyer 2003), participatory democracy and the Alexandra Renewal Project (Khoza 2008, Sinwell 2008, 2010) and xenophobia (Tafira 2009, for xenophobia in general see Nyamnjoh 2006). Another strand of research focuses on questions of health and HIV (Le Marcis 2004, 2012).

2 The majority of quotations by urban dwellers presented in this book stem from ethnographic interviews conducted between 2010 and 2012 in Johannesburg and Maputo. Interviews conducted in English were transcribed by the author. Interviews conducted in Portuguese were transcribed by Fernando Tivane and translated into English by the author. The indicated age of the urban dwellers refers to the approximate age at the time of the interview. All personal names, except those by the field assistants, are pseudonyms, and minor personal details have been adapted in order to ensure anonymity.

andra – framing it as a home of proud property owners, a struggle moment, a problem to be solved, 'Gomorrah' or as a space of creativity – exemplify the way the township is highly differentiated, and not simply a homogeneous 'slum'. Alexandra becomes constituted by such competing discourses, diverging lifestyles, manifold sociabilities as well as conflicts. Such diversity *within* neighbourhoods tends to go unseen in imaginations of unequal cities as bifurcated into two worlds, be it suburb and township in Johannesburg, or elite neighbourhoods and *bairro* in Maputo. The analysis of *cities of entanglements* thus starts by deconstructing, through the ethnography of Alexandra, the idea of the poor neighbourhood as homogeneous and enclosed. Alexandra emerges as deeply connected to other spaces, while there are also very powerful boundaries characterising its residents' lives.

Alexandra – African Land in the White City

> Alex is the only township that resisted removal and kept freehold title deeds … Many property owners are still battling to get their granted title deeds – a pride of many South Africans who for many years were denied a right to property (Speech by Obed Bapela at Media Launch Alexandra Centenary, printed document in the press kit, 22 May 2012).

In 2012, Alexandra turned 100 years old, and local organisations and politicians celebrated the occasion extensively by pointing to the importance of the township in the larger South African context. Obed Bapela, born in Alexandra and a deputy minister since 2010, emphasised in the speech above how 'Alex' had survived through resistance to removals, a struggle personified by the figure of the property owner (Bapela 2012). This is one of five key narratives about the township, claiming that Alexandra is a freehold township, the only one that survived apartheid, and hence home to proud African landowners. As Eriksen points out, such myths of origin – whether they are recent creations (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1984) or simply particular views of the past – are powerful tools for creating a sense of belonging, for spreading and legitimating a particular view of the present and making political claims (Eriksen 2001a: 273). Similar to what Lentz (cf. Lentz 2013b: 4) experienced in her research on rural land conflicts in West Africa, the descendants of these former landowners in Alexandra were also always eager to recount the history of the neighbourhood and how their ancestors acquired land and were then expropriated.

In 1912, the European investor Papenfus bought the land on which Alexandra stands and declared it a 'freehold' township, where non-Whites were allowed to acquire land.[3] Because of the 1913 Natives Urban Land Act, it soon became one of the very few places where Africans could buy urban land. Better-off Africans – commercially successful farmers, or members of the small Black petty bourgeoisie – bought stands in Alexandra and established a social order based on tenant–landlord relationships. In order to pay off their bonds, they rented out rooms and land to poorer Africans seeking a better life in the city. Based on the stable rent income and their business activities they could turn themselves into a Black urban middle class (Heer 2018). As an elderly property owner recalled in 2011: "We were the only Black people to own property then. The gov-

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3   A more detailed exploration of this topic can be found in Heer (2018).

ernment didn't like that at times, that's why they wanted to destroy Alexandra" (Alpoa Youth lecture movement, February 2011).

Landlord–tenant relations became contested, unsettled and more complex when the descendants of the approximately 2000 original property owners were expropriated during apartheid. Tens of thousands of people were removed, yet many disenfranchised property owners could remain in their houses, if only without formal property rights. A complex web of unofficial property rights has emerged since then. Some expropriated property owners managed to continue to exercise exclusive control over their property and extract rents from tenants. Yet there were also many tenants who turned themselves into landlords by subletting rooms and building shacks. In the context of poverty and extreme scarcity of land, extracting rents is till today a key income strategy for many Alexandra residents who manage somehow to gain access to a house, be it by waiting for a government house, by occupying open space or by informally or formally inheriting a house in which parents, relatives or acquaintances have lived.

The descendants of the former property owners have remained a politically powerful, vocal milieu, even though many have lost the material base of their middle-class identity (Heer 2018). Property ownership and expropriation were central to the discourses of the liberation movement (James, Ngonini and Nkadimeng 2005: 827), and still receive considerable attention in ANC political discourse. During the early 1990s, a symbolically charged land reform programme was developed. In the 1990s, 1695 families of former Alexandra property owners made a successful group claim under the Restitution of Land Rights Act (1994). The case was appealed and only in 2016 was an agreement between the landowners and the government signed (Heer 2018), with the topic of land restitution having occupied an important place in the public debates and interventions in Alexandra's urban renewal in the last two decades. A court interdict forbade the Alexandra Renewal Project (ARP), a flagship urban renewal project in place since 2001, to develop any of the contested properties till the case had been settled. This forced the ARP to construct new housing on the periphery of Alexandra, like at the Far East Bank, and it also increased pressures to find land in nearby suburbs, like Linbro Park (see chapter 4).

As the speech by Obed Bapela at the centenary celebrations in 2012 exemplifies, in official discourse land restitution for former property owners is upheld as an important political goal. In the complexities of local politics, however, exponents of the ANC have an ambivalent relationship with it: they maintain that the property owners are 'self-interested' and that their land claim is blocking development for the rest of Alexandra's residents. They argue that because of the court interdict the ARP cannot progress with the upgrade of the housing stock in Old Alexandra (Thabo Mokgothu, political advisor to the ARP, February 2011; Ron, executive of the ARP, March and June 2012). Like the rural case described by James (2000), the local ANC branch prefers to support the side of the current occupants and tenants than the former property owners. Hence, interest groups like Alpoa (Alexandra Land and Property Owners' Association, see below), which claims to represent the interests of former property owners, engage in many practices to keep the imagery of Alexandra as a historically exceptional place, the only urban neighbourhood with African property ownership during apartheid, alive. In 2011 and 2012, for example, their youth group organised weekly events called 'Lecture movement' where elders from Alpoa recounted their version of Alexandra to young urban dwellers. Activists from Alpoa also actively build relationships – entan-

glements – with researchers and journalists to ensure that their version of what 'Alex' is enters their writing.

Alexandra – A Struggle Monument

> It's an old population … I think to an extent it's unique. A lot of our settlements in South Africa are not old … But they feel very strong and attached to Alex; they are very … very emotional about Alex. And they are very proud of the fact that the government of the day then did not succeed in getting them out. The fact that so many political leaders in South Africa, leaders in business and in politics, came from Alex (Ron, executive employee at ARP, March 2011).

In this conversation, Ron, an executive employee at ARP, refers to a second important narrative about Alexandra, namely 'Alex' as a site of memory for the successful resistance against apartheid, the neighbourhood thus becoming a struggle monument. This narrative emphasises Alexandra's role in the political struggle against apartheid, the many South African leaders who came from the township, and the continuing power in the post-apartheid phase to shape national politics through (violent) protests. This empowering image, which links the political history of the township to the national culture of memory and the master narratives of struggle against apartheid is very common among politicians and bureaucrats, and the middle-aged and elderly residents who experienced the struggle. This narration involves the practice of entangling Alexandra with other South African places, of linking Alexandra's history with the history of the nation, and hence of making Alexandra relevant beyond itself.

Alexandra indeed has a history of self-governance and radical democratic politics. When White suburbs around Alexandra grew in the 1930s, their residents started to demand that what they called a 'Black spot', a black neighbourhood in a White part of the city, be removed. There were four attempts by the state to remove the township, namely in 1940, 1943, 1950 and 1979 (Bonner and Nieftagodien 2008, Curry 2012: 2012). Alexandra residents successfully fought off extinction each time. The threat of removal shaped township politics until 8 May 1979, when the 'Save Alex Campaign' definitively put a stop to it and government abolished the plans.

In the 1980s, during the height of resistance against apartheid, self-governance bodies were put in place in many townships, including Alexandra (so-called 'organs of people's power'). At that time, many young men fought on the streets against the police and the military of the apartheid regime, risking their education and lives by protesting for months and years. One of them was my field assistant Thabo Mopasi, born around 1970 and today father of eight children. He is a descendant of long-term tenants, an ANC (African National Congress) activist and an influential personality in the township. He has been involved in many research projects in the township and also supported this study greatly as gatekeeper. For men like him, memories of the struggle against apartheid became inscribed in Alexandra's spaces; when I walked with him past certain street corners, he would tell me about the protests that took place there and the injuries his friends suffered there. These are not happy memories, as they involve violence and the loss of friends to bullets; but remembering his contribution to the overthrow of oppressive structures instils feelings of pride and self-worth in the present. One day I watched the news on television with Thabo and some of his friends;

this was during the Arab Spring and the TV was broadcasting how activists had made the Egyptian president Mubarak step down. The emotions of Thabo and his friends overflowed, they put their fists in their air and started to sing struggle songs from the 1980s. They were re-enacting what Bank called the "social and cultural style of the comrades", the lifestyle of the youth involved in the struggle against apartheid (Bank 2011). This ethnographic instance exemplifies how the decades of resistance created a distinct and strong political culture and political agency in Alexandra; how the struggle shaped the contemporary "modes of being" (ibid: pos. 77), the ways of thinking, feeling, talking, acting; the ways of relating to others, to the built environment and to oneself. The imagery about Alexandra as a place of struggle is not only a politically instrumentalised discourse of memory but is also inscribed in the township as a lived space.

The memory discourse became formalised and officialised in 2011 by over 100 heritage site signs, a public history and tourism project forming part of a larger 'Alexandra Tourism Development Project' (funded by the ARP and the tourism department). The signs mark places which are considered memorable, like the yard where Nelson Mandela used to live. Although the heritage signs are officially designed as an attraction aimed at tourists, organisations like Alpoa also use them to make sure that knowledge about the past and the related pride and identity are transmitted to the youth.

A Problem to be Solved

One day in February 2011 I went for a walk through the township with four young men. They were unemployed and created purpose in their lives by engaging in the arts, volunteering at the youth desk of the local Community Police Forum (CPF) and by maintaining an urban food garden project in Far East Bank which was where we were heading. When we walked past a taxi rank, they explained to me that this spot was very dark and dangerous, which was why they patrolled there on weekends with the CPF. When we walked past a cemetery, they explained that the cemeteries were full and residents had to bury their relatives in faraway Midrand, which constituted a spiritual problem. When walking past the Jukskei River they pointed out proudly the many filled rubbish bags on the river bank and explained that they were part of a public work programme engaged in cleaning the river. These men, and many others whom I accompanied on walks through the township, constantly commented on urban issues which they defined as social problems.

Alexandra residents often conceive of living in Alexandra as harsh and there is general agreement on the definition of social problems which affect almost everyone, like HIV, poverty, lack of housing, environmental degradation, teenage pregnancy, crime and drugs. Urbanites who are engages in civic organisations, youth groups, political parties or other community structures, define many of the phenomena they observe as problems, collect information, talk and make political claims about them. The best-informed commentators, researchers, analysts and critics of Alexandra are the township dwellers themselves This everyday construction of Alexandra as a space full of problems present in local politics, everyday political discussions and everyday life is influenced by the terminology of social problems used by NGOs and the government. Children become familiarised with these discourses in, for example, in school where they learn about child pregnancy, HIV and drug abuse. It is also reflected in academic and journalistic work on Alexandra.

A related, very powerful narrative on Alexandra, often upheld by outsiders and newcomers, constructs the township as an extremely dangerous place of crime, a 'no-go' area and hotbed of criminal activities. This outsider view powerfully shapes the social reality of youth lifestyles in the township.

> When I have to say "I am from Alexandra", when I am out there, people ... change their face, their gesture changes ... all atmosphere changes because of the area that you come from, because of, you know, the past ... crime rate, and stuff like that. [...] They look at me as if I were from a savage area. As you have been around, Barbara, in Alexandra for quite a period of time, you have seen that Alexandra people are normal people, they are modern people, it's a civilised community. It's just that the infrastructure development overshadows that; it paints a dark picture to the outside world (Tebogo, a 30-something member of Alpoa Youth, February 2011).

In this image of Alexandra as crime-ridden, place becomes a stigma, attached to Tebogo's body, like a 'spatial destiny' and an isomorphism of place and identity (Tonkiss 2005: 45). In particular, young, male and black township dwellers like Tebogo become 'othered', what he articulates as 'being treated like a savage'. Young men from Alexandra especially are confronted with these prejudices when looking for a job. Some resort to giving an address in one of the neighbouring formerly White suburbs on their CV in order to avoid the stigma.

Crime is not only stigmatised by outsiders but is also a social reality. Alexandra is indeed not a safe place to live. The 2005 Benchmark survey conducted by the ARP showed that robbery and assault were the most common crime (Alexandra Renewal Project 2005). Forty-one per cent of the participants said that they did not feel safe at all, while only 20 per cent said they felt very safe (ibid). For women, sexual assault in public spaces and violence by romantic partners are agonising urban realities.

'Gomorrah'

There is a further layer to the idea of Alexandra as a problem which deserves mentioning. Young Alexandra dwellers often link the local notion of *ikazi* (home) to the notion of 'ghetto', inspired by globalising countercultures like hip hop emerging from black American ghettos (Castañeda 2012: 177). Rappers and others refer to Alex affectionately as 'Gomorrah', like the biblical city full of sinners eventually destroyed by God. This *ikazi* discourse can be read as a youthful, artistic reinterpretation of Alexandra's stigma as crime-ridden and poverty stricken.

> I wish people knew Alex like I do ... it's not about shacks that are on little space ... It's people coming together from close to far to make a good living ... I'm proud to be born here ... I'm proud to be a Gomorian ... (Anonymised Facebook entry, pinboard Alex Mews Gomora, January 2012).

> There is no place lyk alex A.K.A G-town even celebs wish 2be here every mondy nyt n sundy nyt,hw grate is that huh ...? (anonymised comment on the post above, January 2012).

Growing up close to criminal gangs is portrayed as making township youth especially 'street wise' and 'cool'. The notion of the 'cool' township youth becomes constituted in relation to notions of the 'soft' youth of the suburbs. Letsatsi, the 17-year-old daughter of a middle-class household in River Park, a newer section of Alexandra, who was attending a mixed private school in a nearby suburb, expressed the typical view that the boys from the suburbs are seen as silly and naïve by township youth, not least because they tend to live indoors and knew less about the world than those in the township who were exposed to everything and had to learn how to deal with it. Letsatsi would accompany her suburban friends to what she calls 'classy' clubs in malls in Rosebank or Midrand, but she would actually prefer to go out in Alexandra as she considered herself a 'ghetto girl' who liked the rough style of township clubbing, although she was aware of the risks.

> I am a ghetto girl, I prefer Alex. I enjoy there, even though it's not safe. It depends on what kind of people you are around and stuff. If you are around gangsters, you won't last actually. But if you are around good people in that area, I am telling you, you come out clean (Letsatsi, River Park resident, June 2012).

These examples effectively illustrate the way people subjected to 'othering' do not automatically adopt this position, but employ practices to deal with it, like constructing themselves as superior to the 'soft' suburban youth because of dealing with hardship every day and seeing it as a source of 'coolness'.

Space of Creativity

A further image, strongly contradicting the narrative of 'ghetto' and spatial destiny, constructs Alexandra as a site of relative freedom and possibilities, which leads to cultural creativity and vibrant lifestyles. Like Sophiatown (Hannerz 1994), Alexandra has seen artistic productions of theatre, music and other forms of art, and is known as a legendary party place to which people from all over Johannesburg, at least from Black milieus, have been going for decades. The relative 'freedom' as a freehold township not completely under the grip of the apartheid state provided a fertile setting for political movements, cultural creativity and leisure spaces. During apartheid, when public life was restricted for the Black domestic workers living on their employers' properties in the White suburbs, many came to Alexandra at the weekend to party. Bonner and Nieftagodien argue that politics and culture "fed off each other" (Bonner and Nieftagodien 2008: 169). Today, Alexandra's nightlife continues to be known all over Johannesburg, not least because of hip hop, pantusla and kwaito artists and deep house DJs, some of whom have become famous nationally (for example Malamesh whose songs were played in the soap opera Zone 14 on SABC1, or Razor from LiquidDeep). There are music production studios, theatre productions, and manifold youth groups engaging in various dance forms, as well as many choirs and artists.

Entangled Anxieties in Home Spaces

With a surface area of about eight square kilometres and an estimated number of inhabitants of 340,000 people (Alexandra Renewal Project 2005), high density living is a powerful everyday reality in the township. During the different phases of the city's history, moving to Alexandra and other relatively 'free' areas was a strategy for urbanites to avoid living in a state-planned township like Soweto or being removed to rural areas. Here, beyond what the state could 'see' (Bollens 2007, Scott 1999), people considered illegitimate urbanites by the state found the space to nevertheless develop an urban existence. However, the attractiveness of Alexandra for people arriving in the city turned housing and urban land into highly scarce, contested resources in the township. The private spaces of houses, shacks and rented rooms in Alexandra are hence also highly political and politicised spaces in the neighbourhood, as they are in many other South African townships. Urban scholarship, however, often overemphasises the significance of struggles around public spaces and neglects what happens in private spaces like homes.

Alexandra is home to a large shifting population of people who arrived recently, newcomers with strong connections to rural areas or other African countries where they aim to return one day. Some of them intend to reside only temporarily in Alexandra before finding a home somewhere else, while others eventually become long-term tenants or even 'owners' of properties they acquired somehow. Nnana, a field assistant living in River Park, and her family, for example, belong to this milieu of newcomers. Nnana's mother moved to Johannesburg in the 1980s, and since then she worked as a domestic worker in Linbro Park, while her children stayed at home in a rural area with relatives.[4] Since they finished school, her children have been moving between Johannesburg and the rural area, depending on where they managed to find work. I became close friends with Nnana and her family during fieldwork and they helped me to get in contact with residents of River Park, the section of Alexandra they were living in. They rented a tiny shack of about sixteen square metres in size in a backyard they shared with other shack dwellers, most of whom also came from neighbouring countries and rural areas. The shack had a large fridge in which the neighbours also stored their food; although they did not consider each other friends, the backyard neighbours shared resources and everyday lives. Nnana's shack was divided into a more public area with a couch where relatives, neighbours and friends often sat during the day, and a more private realm, a large bed hidden behind a curtain, where the five family members (the mother, the two adult daughters and two children) slept. As is common in many Alexandra households, each family member kept her clothes and other personal belongings stored in a bag, neatly separated from the belongings of the others, and squeezed together into one closet.

The second household I gained intimate knowledge of was that of my field assistant, Thabo, who was living with his wife and nine children in a complex amalgam of rooms

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4 River Park was built in the 1990s, on the eastern border of the township adjacent to the suburb of Lombardy East and the national highway, the N3. It is geographically close to Linbro Park and Greenstone shopping mall, which is why I conducted many interviews in 2012 in this area which residents consider a section of Alexandra. River Park was built for Alexandra residents who were internally displaced during the civil war of 1991/1992 in Alexandra. Nnana's family was living in a rented shack in River Park.

belonging to house in 12th Avenue, where his brother was also living with his family. They had divided the house they had inherited from their parents into two parts, nevertheless Thabo and his brother often fought; such conflicts are typical of the dense living in Alexandra. His wife's parents lived in an adjacent yard on 13th Avenue and owing to a lack of space three of his nine children usually slept at his in-laws. Thabo's wife also spent much time during the day at her mother's house, so that the two houses and yards, although spatially separated, were actually closely interlinked through the everyday practices of their inhabitants. Such interconnected households may even stretch across sub-quarters; daughters living with boyfriends in a new section of Alexandra may spend the day at their mothers' house in 'old' Alex, enjoying the sociability and support networks they still lack at the new place.

When space is scarce, privacy becomes interactionally achieved and highly contested, and is structured by the temporal rhythms of the household. At Thabo's house, there were doors which people could close, for example to take a bath out of the bucket. When a woman was talking a bath, other women and children would walk in and out of the room, but men and teenage boys would stay away, respecting the temporary space of female intimacy. In Nnana's shack where there was no room to retreat to, male visitors would leave the shack whenever someone was about to take a bath, while women would sometimes stay. The person taking a bath would conceal her body behind the curtain separating the living area from the bed. The person would even continue talking to the female visitors while washing behind the curtain. Household members could lie on the bed behind the curtain, napping or watching TV, with little children crawling around on the bed. However, visitors and other family members, sitting not even two metres away on the couch, would not talk to the person behind the curtain, as her gesture of lying down behind the closed curtain symbolised her wish for distanciation, her desire to be left alone.

Besides material boundaries like curtains or doors and social boundaries like silence, time also offers boundaries which enable privacy. When I was staying at Thabo's in-laws' house, I used to share the couch in the living room with his oldest daughter. When everybody else was asleep and the house locked, we chatted about boyfriends, and secretly drank beer which was left over from the weekend. Many teenagers use these quiet nightly hours to escape from the house and to go to nightclubs or meet with a boyfriend in the yard. Privacy in this moment meant being able to evade parental control for a while.

Lack of privacy means being under the constant control of parents, being visibly exposed to others and being forced to interact with others. Attempts to create privacy are often contested in the context of scarcity of private space, which causes anxiety and conflict. Many Alexandra dwellers experience life as harsh because of unemployment, badly equipped schools, decaying urban infrastructure, interpersonal violence, crime and the like. Many residents hence complain about stress, which, in their view, is significantly enhanced by the anxieties around private space. Many understand the lack of space as pathological and as limiting their agency: "You can't be creative in a space like this", explained Paul, a 60-year-old pensioner in Alexandra (February 2011), referring to the high residential density. Urban dwellers tend to explain social ills like child abuse and domestic violence in terms of the lack of privacy: living on top of each other makes things visible to children and teenagers which they should not see, according to the residents. The head of a primary school explained in an interview that

some brothers abuse their sisters because they imitate the sexual practices of their parents: "The shacks are too small. What they observe, they do" (Head of Carter Primary School, February 2011). Young people are said to be influenced by seeing neighbours taking drugs or getting drunk, or by seeing their neighbours who rob houses in nearby suburbs leading comfortable lives.

When I started doing fieldwork in Alexandra, I wanted to explore diverse meanings of public space. But the longer I spent in the township, the more I learnt to recognise that home space and private land are foremost in the minds of Alexandra residents. Home space is the quintessential private space and refers to the spaces within which urban residents 'dwell'.[5] Dwelling here refers to both a place and a process and involves social and spatial practices (Jenkins 2012a: 6). In Maputo and Johannesburg, dwelling and home space are the areas in which I observed major differences in urban life. In Maputo the African *Caniço* urban areas developed largely unplanned and under less control than townships in South Africa. The 'informal' form of urban development on the outskirts of Maputo makes access to urban land for the poor much easier in comparison to Johannesburg. Many of the young people I met in Maputo, from lower to upper income levels, were working towards constructing a house, based on continuous, patient savings. They would buy a plot on the informal land market on the peri-urban fringes of the city, then they would buy bags of cements whenever they had saved some money and they would build a house over the years; usually a simple house, but more or less conforming to what they considered to be a decent house. Such a route to becoming a home owner did not exist for the majority of urbanites I interacted with in Johannesburg. Although many urban dwellers in Johannesburg engage in the self-production of home space, these practices are considered illegal by the state and neither do they conform to the residents' ideas of decent housing. In Alexandra, there are many informal practices of land access, like the occupation of industrial buildings or buildings under construction, the illegal occupation of land in shack settlements, or the renting of an illegally constructed shack at the back of an RDP house.[6] But in contrast to Maputo, where constructing an own house on the peri-urban fringe is considered a route to social growth, the illegal and informal forms of land access existing in Alexandra tend to be associated with stigma and poverty. While in absolute terms, poverty is far more rampant in Maputo, relative deprivation in the sense of decent housing seems to be a bigger problem in Johannesburg – at least for many of Alexandra's milieus, who have a vexed, troubled relationship with urban land distinct from what I experienced in Maputo.

Alexandra is only about a kilometre away from affluent Sandton, the 'Manhattan' of Africa, with its many office towers, fancy shopping malls, international hotels and elegant restaurants. Seeing the skyline of Sandton in the background of the sea of dense housing in Alexandra is experienced and represented by many residents as the epitome of their exclusion and the rampant inequality in the 'world class African city', as the City of Johannesburg likes to brand itself. Alexandra and Sandton, though, should not be seen as separate entities, rather, they are structurally, economically, culturally and socially deeply connected and interdependent on each other.

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5 I derive the notion from the research programme 'Home Space in African Cities' (Jenkins 2012a).

6 The government-built houses are colloquially referred to as 'RDP' after the Reconstruction and Development Programme introduced in the 1990s.

> Sandton City as you see it, it has been built by the people of Alexander. Many people here in Alexander participated in the building of Sandton city (Thabo Mopasi, a 40-something member of the long-term tenant milieu and field assistant, February 2011).

Many Alexandra residents like to emphasise this interdependence. In the quote above, Thabo points out how Alexandra's labour power was used to build the fancy suburb. This point is theoretically extremely important for the way in which we understand Alexandra's relationship with Sandton, namely, as mutually entangled and interdependent. This point builds on a Brazilian strand of favela research, by among others Epstein (1973), who systematically investigated relations between Brasília's' spontaneous, poor areas and the planned city and concluded that these are reciprocal yet asymmetric patron–client relationships, on which both – the elite in the planned city and the poor in the satellite towns – depend. Similarly, Perlman, in her ethnographic study on favelas in Rio de Janeiro, reconceptualised the urban poor not as marginal in the sense of 'outside the system', but as asymmetrically integrated into society (Perlman 1979, see also Aceska, Heer and Kaiser-Grolimund 2019).

Issues around waste and hygiene also materialise as intricate entanglements between Alexandra and Sandton. When 340,000 urbanites share a few square kilometres, the disposal of waste becomes a pressing issue, especially as waste collection by the underfunded municipality is not always reliable. Alexandra is experienced by many of its residents as a very dirty place. The epitome of the dirt is the rats that surface at night.[7] Rats, almost the size of cats, run around the yards and streets. For this reason, residents store their food carefully in buckets. Residents told me with disgust that sleeping children's extremities are sometimes eaten away by the nightly visitors. Many people experience the rat plague as one of the most disturbing and unhealthy aspects of living in the township. In terms of social analysis, the disgust felt and the tabloid media that fuel the hysteria can be read as a preoccupation with social disorder. Social disorder is what dirt is mainly about (Dlamini 2010: 68, Douglas 2005 [1966]: 2).

Muhle, a neighbour of Thabo's in-laws' yard in her forties, explained to me in March 2011 that she usually cleans her handbag before she leaves for work because cockroaches sometimes crawl into it at night. She feared that a cockroach might suddenly crawl out of in her bag in a minibus taxi or at work, which would be very embarrassing for her. Decency and cleanliness considered appropriate for urban places like taxis, malls or the workplace demand everyday practices for keeping the dirt at bay. Muhle and other Alexandra residents were very much aware that the neighbouring suburbs were not as cockroach or rat-invested as Alexandra, not least because waste collection worked better there. The rats are then not only about social disorder but also a reminder of the township's exclusion and marginalisation within the 'world class' city.

Yet even the intimate practices of personal hygiene in the township are connected to the economies of affluent Sandton. In Alexandra, I asked a couple of friends to keep

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7 See the remarkable short documentary by the project Hillside Digital/Siyakhona "Rats in Alexandra Township" (www.youtube.com/watch?v=A3oU5Meeo0PY). The documentary was broadcasted on national TV (SABC) in 2010. The City of Johannesburg Region E initiated a clean-up campaign on 1 September 2010, presenting it as a response to the documentary. However, rats continue to be a major concern in Alexandra and other townships.

a diary of their everyday routines (Zimmerman and Wieder 1977), based on which we had long conversations. When interviewing Muhle, after she had filled in a self-administered diary, we came across the topic of what she called *toilet rolls*:

> Barbara: You wrote here in the diary: "The other lady from the next yard called me to take toilet rolls". What does this mean? Muhle: You know, where she works, they use toilet rolls to wipe their hands after washing them. So that lady, she took those toilet rolls from the plastics they throw them into, dried them, and she gave them to us, to use them for the toilet (Muhle, 40-year-old neighbour of Thabo's in-laws, April 2011).

Women like Muhle's neighbour who work in the malls and the office towers of nearby Sandton collect used paper towels from the toilets they clean. They take them home, dry them, and provide their own household and their neighbours with this paper to be used as toilet paper. Thus, through toilet rolls, Sandton's malls and Alexandra's home spaces become intimately connected.

The inequality for which Johannesburg is so famous not only exists between people who are strangers to each other but also characterises home spaces and families, especially if family members have come to belong to different urban milieus and have moved, for example, to a suburb. The southern boundary of Alexandra is formed by London Road, an east–west route which connects Sandton to Linbro Park and Modderfontein. A couple of warehouses separate the busy road from the previously White-zoned suburbs of Kew, Bramley View and Lombardy West. What used to be a strict social, legal and physical boundary between the Black township and the White-zoned suburb has nowadays become fluid: Alexandra has – as urban dwellers would say– 'expanded'; squatters have taken over warehouses and constructed shacks around them. However, many Alexandra residents have also become more affluent and have moved to the neighbouring suburbs. They constitute a new middle class; a middle class that started to emerge slowly in the 1980s and has grown considerably since 1994. In the 1960s, only 15 per cent of middle-class employment was non-White. By 2001 they constituted 50 per cent (Crankshaw 2008: 1695). In Alexandra, such social climbers are hard put to find a house they regard as appropriate to their new social status, so many decide to move out if they can afford it.

Tebogo is about 35 years old, belongs to the long-term tenant milieu and lives with her husband and children in an inherited house in the old sections of Alexandra. Her cousin, Steven, is a pastor and the owner of a successful company. He bought a house in the adjacent Lombardy East, a few kilometres away from where he grew up. The house is an old suburban house with a rough outside but with an expensive interior design. There is expensive leather furniture, shiny tiling and the most recent kitchen technology. The spatial proximity to his relatives and friends in Alexandra allows Steven to keep up his social commitments easily. Many others have moved further away to places like Midrand where they now live in new-built fashionable townhouse complexes. Some of these 'movers out' bring their children daily to their Alexandra homes so that relatives can look after them while they are at work. Some eventually move back to the township because they feel isolated in the townhouse complexes and continue to spend most of their social lives in Alexandra. Moving out of Alexandra also has advantages, however. The geographical distance can provide a social distanciation and a relief from the many demands for money, the conflicts and jealousy from neighbours

and family. Many also move out when they can afford it because they want to escape the crime and violence. Because of these processes, researchers say that desegregation is occurring along class lines: the previously racially defined townships are still almost exclusively black, while the Northern suburbs are becoming desegregated for those who belong to middle- and upper-class milieus (ibid: 1698).

One weekend in March 2011, I accompanied Tebogo and her cousin Steven to celebrate his mother's birthday. His mother was living in Rabie Ridge, a township established during apartheid for 'coloured' people who were forcibly removed from Alexandra. Steven, the wealthy pastor living in Lombardy East, had built a beautiful house for his mother. Tebogo and her cousin's wife were both helping in the kitchen; Tebogo's hands were rough from washing and cleaning the township house of her large family, while the pastor's wife living in the suburb had long gel nails. The pastor's wife was well aware of how a daughter-in-law should behave at such a celebration; she had grown up in a township herself. But as the wife of a wealthy pastor, she had become used to different bodily practices and habits to Tebogo. Both Tebogo and her cousin's wife had brought their babies with them. Tebogo had put four diapers and an extra set of clothing for the baby in a handbag; the baby was wearing a practical dress which had been worn by many children of the neighbours sharing the same yard. Her cousin's wife, however, had brought along a large bag full of diapers, processed baby food in glass jars and countless other bits of baby equipment. Her son was dressed in fashionable baby jeans and sneakers from a famous brand. I noticed the way Tebogo became self-conscious about her milieu-specific child-rearing practices in the presence of her cousin's wife. Tebogo observed that the pastor's wife was constantly cleaning her baby boy's runny nose; she then discovered that her own baby had dried snot under her nose which she had not paid attention to for a while. She cleaned the snot with her figure and wanted to clean her finger on her dress, then looked at the pastor's wife and decided to ask me for a napkin. She thus tried to adhere to ideals of hygiene and cleanliness which she saw as typical of the suburban, better-off lifestyle of her cousin's family. The women then together cooked the food that the pastor had bought for his mother's birthday. Through the familiar, shared practice of cleaning vegetables and cooking together, the social tensions eased a little. On the way home, Tebogo told me that the pastor's wife was very jealous; a comment which showed, I believe, how these entanglements – family bonds criss-crossing township and suburban lifestyles, enmeshing poor and new middle-class urban dwellers – are in a way ordinary yet also contradictory sites of contentions, tensions and conflicts.

Solidarity and Power in Yard Life

Themba lived in the same yard as Thabo's in-laws, where she inhabited a single room, together with her fifteen daughters and grandchildren. As a joke she liked to say that because so many bodies kept the house warm, she never had to use a heater and so she could save money (Themba, March 2011). One advantage of living in close proximity to others is the sociality and mutual help from neighbours who share the same yard.

> Here in Alexander, our houses are very close to each other. If you don't have a phone, you go to your neighbour and ask. In Soweto, each and every one has his own yard. So,

each and every one is minding his or her business. In Alexandra, it's very nice, it's like we are a family, you don't struggle very much. But: You can't go to a neighbour all the time to ask something to eat. We are 17 here in the house! The neighbour won't able to provide a mealie meal for us (Amahle, resident in Alexandra, March 2011).

In this conversation, Amahle, another neighbour in Thabo's in-laws' yard, points out positive aspects of proximity to neighbours, but also explains the limits of reciprocity in this context of poverty.

Yards are communal spaces shared by different families whose houses, added rooms or shacks are located on the same property stand. Yards constitute a middle ground between the public space of the street and the private space of the home. Yards are gendered spaces, shaped by normative expectations of masculinity and femininity and the gendered division of labour. Once the children have left for school in the mornings, women start their routine of cleaning their houses. Clothes washing they usually do in the yard, and later the women interact with female neighbours who are also busy with their cleaning routine. When the women have finished their chores, they may take a bath and then sit on the fringes of the yard observing the male-dominated life on the street while the children who are too young to go to school play together in the yard. The women only leave the yard once they have finished the daily household chores and have organised someone to look after the children. Many men, often unemployed, gather in less female-dominated spaces like shebeens, or on street corners, or they go around looking for a job.

In summer, women withdraw to the private spaces of the houses, shacks and rooms only at night. Neighbours live close to each other, physically and socially close, and share each other's dramas like a death, a lost job, family fights, as well as their celebrations such as a birthday, a pregnancy or a new job. They give each other emotional support and, if possible, share material resources. Residents of Thabo's in-laws' yard told me that it would be hard for them to eat a nice dinner knowing that the family next door had no food; hence, neighbours often bring each other plates of food. As Simone pointed out, the capacity to treat neighbours, kin and friends well is a central ethos of social networks in African cities where access to material well-being must be channelled through a nexus of social relations (Simone 1994: 17). When a baby is born in a yard, female neighbours bring their old baby clothes to the new mother, and she will pass them on to the next new mother. Sometimes this clothes-sharing circuit remains within the networks of the yard, sometimes people from neighbouring yards participate. The boundary of the yard is therefore a social one rather than a geographical one; the metaphorical boundary of the yard ends where the everyday sharing ends, not where the stand ends.

The households in a yard negotiate a rotation scheme for shared facilities: the women use the shared washing lines in turn, and also clean the shared toilet in turns. Not least because of the different household sizes and different working hours, this often leads to conflict. In Alexandra, there is a saying that what people fight about most in the yards are the washing lines.

The communal governance of the yard and toilets and the emotional and material exchanges between neighbours hold the potential for tension and conflict: neighbours may become afflicted by the drug abuse, domestic violence or gang violence that other yard members are involved in. Also the ability to rely on social networks should not

be romanticised or idealised: as Marcel Mauss argued so well, every gift demands a counter-gift (Mauss 1990 [1925]). When the balance of reciprocity cannot be reinstated over a prolonged period, conflict and pressurising expectations, demands and jealousy emerge. According to Bähre "solidarity is not opposed to conflict, nor does conflict necessarily take place outside of the realm of solidarity. Instead, rivalry, conflict, jealousy, and aggression can be at the heart of solidarity networks" (Bähre 2007: 52).

Bähre makes a strong point against romantic notions of solidarity in the way they are sometimes espoused by development research and institutions like the World Bank. Ambivalence is thus key for any analysis of solidarity. My repeated presence in Thabo's in-laws' yard, for example, was a double-edged sword for my host family: on the one hand Thabo's in-laws found it an exciting experience to have a European anthropologist as guest which even brought some prestige, but on the other hand, it increased pressure and demands from their neighbours who thought that I was giving them money.

The yards are spaces of dense and contested conviviality that are also shaped by difference and inequality. One Sunday in February 2011, Thabo and I visited a former fighter in the ANC's military wing (Umkhonto we Sizwe) who was living in the new RDP section in Fast East Bank. As a former police officer, he had a pension and he received health support because of his HIV-positive status. He was a respected elder and had more money than the neighbouring families in the yard. The daughter of a destitute female-headed household living in the same yard would clean and cook for him, and he in turn would assist her family with groceries. During our visit, he became increasingly drunk and started to make explicit jokes about these female neighbours, telling me repeatedly that he was an elder who should be honoured. The symbolic power of his former fighter status, seniority and masculinity, as well as his financial power, placed him in a powerful position over his female neighbours, such that he was able to demand all kinds of services from them.

In the yards, the lives of neighbours who may belong to different generations and lifestyle groups become entangled and may clash. Residents told me that sharing a yard with a criminal gang could be dangerous and annoying, as they commit robberies at night and then party with drugs and loud music throughout the day and night while the families next to them try to lead normal lives. Being around addicts and drunkards and hearing or even seeing violent outbursts in the family life next door is part of what it means to live in the township.

In the past, the social relations embedded in yard life had a strong political significance: they became the basis for 'people's power', a form of self-governance installed in the 1980s as part of the insurrection and struggle against apartheid (Bonner and Nieftagodien 2008: 265, 281, Bozzoli 2010, Lucas 1995). Still today, yard relations and the sharing of resources in yards have an important function, assisting urbanites through the vagaries of economic and other hardships in the city. As Bank (2011) rightly points out, yards are hidden yet very important spaces of cultural life and of social reproduction in townships. Nevertheless, there is still little appreciation of how these yard spaces work socially, and they continue to be under-researched (Bank 2011: 190-191).

Street Life and Difference

The drive from peri-urban Linbro Park with its quiet, green suburban streets (see chapter 3) to the township of Alexandra takes five minutes, but it feels like a drive into a different world. Arriving from Linbro Park one may first drive past River Park and through Far East Bank, new sections of Alexandra built since the 1990s. These were constructed by the state with the intention of providing public housing for Alexandra's poor. The older the planned RDP housing sections are, the more the streets, houses and open spaces show signs of appropriation, adaptation, refurbishing and added constructions. Far East Bank resembles townships all over the country with its typical aesthetics of rows of identical houses. Once one has driven past the middle-class section of East Bank and crossed the Jukskei River, one enters the old sections of Alexandra. Old Alexandra, with its grid layout designed at the beginning of the 20th century, hosts over 85 per cent of Alexandra's households (Alexandra Renewal Project 2005). 'Old Alex', as people call it, has a diverse typology of housing, ranging from old bond houses constructed over 100 years ago to newer houses, as well as many, many shacks. In Old Alex, apart from streets and yards, there is hardly any space unoccupied by housing.

Because of the lack of open spaces and the high density, Alexandra's streets serve many different purposes, which shift with the rhythms of the day and the week. There are informal market stands, street corners where men gamble, residents wash their cars and boys play soccer. While yards are spaces of femininity and children, streets tend to be spaces of masculinity. On specific nights, shebeens may fill up and a whole street may transform into a party venue. When someone dies and the family's yard is not large enough, funeral tents may be put up on the street. In the newer section of Alexandra, streets are even used as spaces for political meetings. Pedestrians usually walk on the street and only move slowly to the sidewalk when a car wants to get through. Car drivers, hence, have to adjust their pace to the many users of the street, which is a social order distinct from Johannesburg's streets outside the township where cars dominate.

Alexandra is anything but a relaxed, quiet place. Rather, it vibrates day and night. It is not a place where urban dwellers let their guard down in public, but people are used to expecting things to happen that impede the flow of everyday life. The eruption of political violence, fights between neighbours, accidents, rape and being mugged on the street are still extraordinary, but people have a sense that this may happen at any time. People who have lived in the township a long time or who have grown up here are affected by this in the same way as newcomers who have moved here recently, but long-term residents have learnt how to move through the township spaces with an air of self-assurance in order to appear 'streetwise' and 'smart'.

In the densely populated streets of Alexandra, the Metro Police, who are responsible for the enforcement of by-laws and traffic rules, are seldom seen and drivers generally prefer not to put on seatbelts. During fieldwork I even was told that I should take my seatbelt off when I drove inside the township, as this would show everyone that I was familiar with Alexandra and hence *streetwise*. "If you are not *streetwise*, you get teased at school and called a 'cheese boy'" (Thabo Mopasi, March 2011). Being called a 'cheese boy' is an insult in the township, meaning a 'weak' man, an expression reflecting notions of class difference and ideas of hegemonic masculinity. A boy who gets

cheese sandwiches from his mother for lunch at school – an expensive meal which many township families cannot afford – does not conform to expectations of masculinity like toughness, strength and street wisdom. Being *streetwise* is an important urban competence in Alexandra. *Street wisdom* locally means a specific type of urban knowledge and competence that helps urban dwellers to move through the dangerous and confusing streets and footpaths of Alexandra. Having a precise mental map of the neighbourhood as a geographical and social space, that is, being able to recognise potentially dangerous places, people and times of day, assists urban dwellers to move around safely, while also paying careful attention to what is happening around them.[8] I was also told, for example, that I was not *streetwise* when I took time to look for exact coins in my purse when paying at the counter; instead, I should keep my money in my pocket, take out what I needed quickly, and put back the change as quickly as possible. Thabo repeatedly told me to wear a cap so that people could not see in which direction I was looking. A cap would hide my glasses, he explained, which also gave me away as an outsider, as wearing glasses was rare in the working-class township. Although I doubted that such behaviour, symbolising *street wisdom*, would make me, a white anthropologist in Alexandra, appear less of an outsider, Thabo's instructions made me aware of the importance of such bodily practices in Alexandra's public spaces.

Outsiders who come to Alexandra are scared of being recognised as outsiders on the street, which points to the performative, symbolic dimension of *street wisdom*: by moving securely through space, one indicates to potential criminals that one is not an easy victim. There is the saying that Alexandra residents can recognise whether someone is from Alexandra or not, which makes non-Alexandrians even more scared when coming to Alexandra.

> There is a difference, but I don't know exactly what this difference is. Even for people who come from Tembisa or from Soweto, you can see that they are not from here. I don't know how, but you can see that these people are not staying here. Maybe it's the movement or … (Manah, a 40-something neighbour of Thabo's in-laws, May 2011).

Trying to explain what is difficult to explicate, Manah, a neighbour in Thabo's in-laws' yard, referred to the corporeal habitus, the way of moving through the township. She argued that she could distinguish whether a stranger was used to moving physically through Alexandra's environment simply on the basis of her visual perception of a body.

Street wisdom as a specific spatial, corporeal and social urban competence has to be learnt through practice and habit, and it is hence not equally shared among members of different milieus in Alexandra. During fieldwork, I became close friends with Nnana, who was a member of the newcomer milieu, and I often moved in her company through the township. This allowed me to compare the experience with the many times I had been on the streets with Thabo, Thabo's children and many other long-term residents. They greeted someone on every street corner; they were familiar with all the different sections of the township and knew exactly how to get home from all of them. Nnana, on the other hand, who only spent a couple of weeks in the township every year and then returned to the rural area, was only familiar with River Park, the

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8   Based on his research in a black neighbourhood in Washington, the anthropologist Ulf Hannerz comes to very similar formulations of the term 'streetwise' (Hannerz 1981: 26)

section where her mother rented a shack. Once, as we drove through the streets of Old Alexandra on our way to the San Kopano community centre, she told me that she had never been to this section of Alexandra before, and stared at the landscape of shacks, cars and people with a combination of fear and fascination. "I never had to go, and I always heard how dirty and dangerous it is" (Nnana, 23-year-old field assistant, resident of River Park, June 2012). As the taxi from River Park could take her directly to the clinic and shops of Alexandra, she had been able to avoid the streets of old Alexandra of which she felt scared. Like many other newcomers she had incorporated outsiders' images of Alexandra as dangerous.

In Lynch's seminal research on urbanites' mental maps, he defined *imageability* as a quality of the built environment which enables urban dwellers to imagine the material city as a mental map and which helps them to move through it with a sense of emotional security (Lynch 1960). Lynch showed that way finding is not a mystic 'instinct', but the result of the consistent use and organisation of sensory cues from the external environment (ibid: 4). What he does not talk about is that there are large differences between milieus in Alexandra between long-term residents and newcomers, in their ability to create mental maps because they use the urban spaces in widely different ways. *Imageability* hence also needs to be defined as the ability of urban dwellers to create a more or less defined mental map of the city as a physical and social space, based on their urban knowledge, experiences and urban competences. The ability to produce a mental map of Alexandra, as well as *street wisdom*, are specifically urban forms of capital which shape the way secure and safe urbanites move through the township, which spaces they go to or avoid, and also the place they hold in the neighbourhood social hierarchy.

Such milieu differences between long-term residents and newcomers become articulated as political categories in Alexandra and are often used to legitimise and delegitimise claims to access to limited urban resources like housing or electricity. The drawing of such political boundaries has shifted historically and situationally, but they tend to revolve around the landlord–tenant relations, distinctions between informal and formal (or legal and illegal), as well as insider–outsider distinctions based on national citizenship and shifting notions of urban citizenship. In the 1950s, Alexandra was declared an area for Natives (Blacks) and in the 1960s, people classified as *Coloured* were forcibly removed (Bonner and Nieftagodien 2008: 178). Not all Black urban dwellers, though, had the right to stay in Alexandra; they were categorised by the state into those considered legitimate urban residents who had legal access to the urban labour and housing market and those considered 'illegal' urban residents whose access to jobs and land was denied (Ferguson 2013: 229). The 1952 Abolition of Passes and Documents Act granted people who were already living in Alexandra rights of permanent residence, while newcomers were excluded from this urban citizenship (Bonner and Nieftagodien 2008: 105). In the 1980s, the Alexandra Master Plan (1980), part of the apartheid regime's carrot-and-stick policy, aimed to upgrade the township and provide housing, but only for 'legal residents', the so-called *bona fides* (ibid: 237). The Burger Alexandra Urban Renewal Plan from 1986 wanted to allocate houses only to those who had arrived before 1986, while those who arrived afterwards were excluded. In the post-apartheid era, when the official racial bifurcation of citizenship rights was abolished, new state categorisations continued the shifting insider–outsider divisions. In 2006, the ARP, on the insistence of the Alexandra Development Forum, shifted housing allocation

from following the housing list, from which mainly old residents would have benefit-ted, to a block-by-block approach which prioritised shack dwellers (Sinwell 2010). This caused considerable animosity among long-term residents towards shack dwellers who were perceived as 'jumping the queue', meaning receiving an RPD house earlier than others who had been waiting longer. Apart from shack dwellers, foreigners have become the new outsiders in the post-apartheid city (Nieftagodien 2008, Worby, Hassim and Kupe 2008: 26).

Johannesburg's winter days can get quite cold. The use of electric stoves or cooking plates for heating rented rooms and shacks, which are often illegally connected to the city's power network, regularly overburdens the system, leading to power outages. On a cold winter's day in 2012, property owners in River Park called for a public meeting on a neighbourhood street. Electricity had been out the whole day and some property owners blamed landlords who had erected illegal shacks in their properties for rental for overburdening the electricity system with their many tenants. The leader of the River Park Community Police Forum (CPF) had called the meeting by blowing a whis-tle, an important means of communication in the township in order to call neighbours to collective action. Landlords and tenants came out of their houses and shacks to the street corner; most of them were women and already in their pyjamas and nightgowns.

A group of women, all shack dwellers and tenants, remained on the other side of the road from the gathering, observing the crowd, and only slowly going closer. One of them explained to me: "The people are angry; they are complaining about us, the shack dwellers, and blaming us for the power outage." Those property owners who did not have shacks in their yard suggested angrily that they would cut off electricity force-fully from all the yards with shacks. One of the shack dwellers responded: "We pay rent, we have the same rights as the others." After a lengthy heated debate, the leader of the River Park CPF called for calm and set the rules for the following meeting:

> The shack people are threatening the landlords. This decision has to be taken by the landlords, and therefore the people from the shacks should leave! Everybody who does not own a house has to leave (Leader of the River Park CPF, June 2012).

The shack dwellers accepted this angrily and retreated to the other side of the street where they remained observing the gathering. Through networked infrastructure, urbanites "become inevitably bound up with one another" (Kirsch 2005: 208). Regular power outages in areas like River Park in Alexandra are related to the high popula-tion density, the many illegal connections and the insufficient investment in electric-ity infrastructure by the municipality. As the philosopher Iris Young rightly argues, in the distributive paradigm typical of a social welfare state like South Africa, social justice becomes defined as an end-state pattern of distribution, while the unjust insti-tutional conditions which determine the distribution move out of the political debate (Young 1990: 15-37). Instead of directing their anger towards the City of Johannesburg and criticising the institutional context which, even in the post-apartheid context, still produces such unequal distribution of services, the political debate on the neighbour-hood street revolved around the allocation of public services among competing social interests. It blamed those who were perceived to have less legitimate access the scarce resources – shack dwellers and foreigners.

By appearing in public something or someone becomes real, Arendt wrote (Arendt 1959 [1958]). In the public many perspectives on the world appear together, "allowing the reality of the world to appear truly" (Madanipour 2003: 168). On this evening, the street corner became temporarily transformed into a space of public debate; temporarily, architectural public space and public sphere came to overlap, very like in the Greek agora (Arendt 1959 [1958]). The notion of the public sphere, the political dimension of the public as a communicative, non-material space in which citizens come together and discuss 'public' issues according to 'rational' standards has been famously coined by Habermas (2002). The liberal public sphere as imagined by Habermas is open to everyone, there are no status hierarchies, and private people come together to discuss 'public' topics which leads to the 'public' opinion (Fraser 2001 [1997]: 112-113). The normative ideals of public spaces and public spheres developed by Arendt and Habermas shape academic discourses in urban studies, yet they need to be criticised. The historical Greek agora was not all-inclusive; it excluded women, slaves and other people who did not have Greek citizenship (Benhabib 1995 [1992]: 124). In 19th century Europe, citizens who did not possess property were excluded from the liberal bourgeois public sphere (Fraser 2001 [1997]: 123-125). These discursive arenas were embedded in the societal inequalities that influenced the social positions of actors within them, even though actors may have pretended that status differences were irrelevant (ibid: 123-125). Also, Habermas' liberal bourgeois public sphere was "structured around significant exclusions" (Crawford 1995: 4, see also Fraser 1994 [1989], 2001 [1997]).

Further, the debate around electricity in River Park was deeply shaped by processes of exclusion, reflecting inequalities in political power, access to housing, citizenship rights and economic resources in the neighbourhood. Because some of the River Park residents were tenants living in shacks, they were excluded from the decision-making process. Their access to the debate became conditional on property ownership and access to housing. Roy (2003) conceptualises such links between property ownership and political citizenship as 'propertied citizenship'. That is to say, "the right to the city is expressed through home ownership" (ibid: 85). Many property owners in Alexandra have the sense that owning property gives them a special right to influence the future of their neighbourhood, at the expense of those who do not have property (for a comparison with propertied citizenship in Linbro Park, see Heer 2018).

A further, in this case non-articulated, implicitly present social category fuelling the exclusion of tenants from this political space is national citizenship; many shack dwellers in the township stem from other African countries and are therefore considered less legitimate residents with less legitimate claims in struggles over scarce resources. While the shack dwellers were observing the meeting from the other side of the road, they felt anger and outrage about their exclusion, but they also silently expressed a sense of threat and fear, based on their past experiences with mob violence in River Park directed against shack dwellers and foreigners. They worried that a mob could indeed cut their electricity cables and turn their anger towards them. The shack dwellers eventually retreated into their yards, electricity returned the next day, and emotions quieted down – at least till the next power outage. This singular event is not simply an anecdote, but an urban situation involving the construction of social boundaries which is typical for River Park, for Alexandra and for politics in post-apartheid South Africa.

Civic Spaces and Routes of Becoming

During the height of the mining industry and racial Fordism, which is how this phase of apartheid has been described (Crankshaw 2008, Gelb 1991), the economy of South Africa and Johannesburg was marked by labour scarcity, which is why migration from rural areas, the larger Southern African region and other continents was key to its growth. In the late apartheid period, however, South Africa radically transformed into a post-Fordist economy with a growing service sector and a demand for skilled labour, which led to a surplus of unskilled labour. In Southern Africa, this economic shift had a radical impact on the region, some argue that it is the second largest change after the macro-historical rupture brought by industrialisation and the rise of capitalism (Ferguson 2013: 230, Seekings and Nattrass 2005).

Getting access to the labour market and constructing a life considered respectable despite unemployment constitute key struggles in the everyday life of most Alexandra residents. A considerable part of the population is permanently locked out of the formal job market and make their living by informal means. A large proportion of Alexandra's households depend on social grants. According to the Benchmark Survey conducted by the ARP in 2005, 80 per cent of Alexandra's households were surviving with less than R3000 a month. The unemployment rate was quoted at 60 per cent in this survey. In the social perception of the residents, the idleness related to unemployment leads to what they see as social ills, like drug abuse, crime and domestic violence.

One way in which Alexandra residents deal with the void and gaps created by a lack of formal employment is through the creation of diverse forms of civic spaces. Civic spaces, how I understand them here, are collective spaces built and existing outside of kin, neighbour and work relations. They offer alternative forms of socialising and subjectification to those offered by the yards, streets, nightlife spaces, shopping malls and churches. The spaces are civic in the sense that their purpose is usually to create a society considered morally good; these spaces are seen as having a social purpose, like assisting the youth to become social beings outside drugs and crime or motivating urban dwellers to become engaged not just for their personal benefit but for the collective good. Hence, these civic spaces contribute substantially to the political, economic and socio-cultural life of the township.

By participating in and co-constituting these spaces, urban dwellers can achieve social respect which may be denied to them in other realms. The resources they build up in these civic spaces – social capital, practical experiences, influence and respect – may assist them to become more successful in other fields of life. Amongst many other things, these civic spaces can be seen as a key form of self-help, not only because their purpose is often to 'help' someone or to 'educate', but because they create alternative forms of being and of being together in a city characterised by inequality and exclusion.

Civic spaces in Alexandra differ in their form of institutionalisation, their degree of materialisation and their manifold social meanings and purposes, ranging from institutionalised, materialised spaces like community centres (San Kopano community centre) to imagined spaces of communal action (Tourism Hub, food garden project) to ephemeral youth spaces (kwassa kwassa dance group). Alexandra also has a long history of community self-help. Over the decades, residents have created many welfare projects out of meagre resources in order to assist community members (Bonner and Nieftagodien 2008: 314-320). Although many projects emerged out of Alexandra itself

and many are totally dependent on themselves, larger initiatives in particular depend on entanglements – on financial and other support from outside the township. In the 1980s, South African municipalities and businesses increased investments in community projects in townships as they hoped to undermine the increasing resistance against apartheid.

One lasting institution from that time is the *Alexsan Kopano* (*San Kopano* for short) community centre on 12th Avenue in old Alexandra. The red-brick centre with a large inner courtyard was constructed in the 1980s by a successful collaboration between township activists and affluent White residents from neighbouring suburbs. They assisted the township dwellers to obtain funding from the development arm of the Protestant churches in *Germany (Evangelischer Entwicklungsdienst, see* Wilson 2003). Nowadays it is administered by a trust; a resident of Linbro Park is also on the board.

The 'multipurpose' centre hosts a library, offices of local NGOs, the local chamber of commerce, the pro-bono branch of a renowned South African law firm, a large community hall and many rooms used for political meetings, church services, functions, training and the like. As an absolute space, by which David Harvey (2006: 133) means the view on space as a fixed geographical space, San Kopano has clearly discernible spatial boundaries: a gate which is locked at night, doors which separate the offices from each other. But, as a relational space, the space created by relationships between objects or actors, it stretches much further. San Kopano is a junction, an intersection of manifold relational spaces. Here residents can access the networks of established township residents who own businesses and who are engaged in ANC or SANCO (South African National Civic Association) networks, which intersect with local NGOs, government branches and other institutions.

San Kopano functions as a hub and springboard for many Alexandra residents, as a space where they can access diverse resources ranging from social networks to books, computers, food parcels, toilets, and information of all sorts. Here young people can attend courses on computer skills or do an internship. Many also come to access computers to compile their CV, to find out how to apply for a university scholarship, or how to raise funds for a project. When visitors at San Kopano meet unknown others, they exchange phone numbers, business cards and information about each other's employment or other connections. Conversations often reminded me of network events like academic conferences.

One day I met a young woman in the bathroom at San Kopano. She was living in the nearby shack settlement and preferred the toilets at San Kopano to the public ablutions. She had just moved to Alexandra from the Eastern Cape to join her sister who had moved there earlier. At the centre she came in contact with the ANC Youth League: "I like to work for community and help people. So I joined the party", she explained to me (Themba, a 24-year-old female shack dweller and ANC youth league volunteer, March 2011). As a 'volunteer' of the ANC Youth League, she was attending political meetings and participating in activities like cleaning up streets and clinics, visiting the elderly and the disabled and organising food donations for them. As a newcomer to the city, participating in the youth league helped her to make friends and get variation into her monotonous life as a young unemployed woman. She included the volunteer experience in her CV, hoping to increase her chances of getting a job.

So the people, organisations and institutions that urban dwellers find at the centre assist them to circulate, namely "to navigate and engage diverse spaces, actors, sensi-

bilities and activities" (Simone 2005b: 519). By sharing all kinds of resources, by creating connections, by generating ideas and projects, the politicians, NGO workers, government officials, volunteers, activists, school children and ordinary urban dwellers who go in and out San Kopano come to be 'people as infrastructure' (Simone 2004b). People as infrastructure do not replace other forms of structures like the state, the market or urban infrastructure, yet they create connections among urban dwellers as well as between urban dwellers and various pools of resources. San Kopano can be understood as an 'assemblage'. Assemblage is a notion that emphasises the processual, undetermined, relational and generative nature of city making, the "eventful, disruptive, atmospheric, and random juxtapositions that characterise urban space" (McFarlane 2011: 651). My field assistant Thabo, for example, regularly assists others to draw up a CV for a job application or get an appointment for a free consultation at the lawyer's office, or he helps journalists to find a good story. Through his and many others' capacity of assembling, connecting, merging and crossing, he is capable of "generating social compositions across a range of singular capacities and needs" (Simone 2004b: 410-11).

One should not forget, however, that networks and assemblages are shaped by inequality and processes of inclusion and exclusion: every network has cuts (Strathern 1996). The assemblage is not equally accessible to everyone: Newcomers, especially those living in more distant sections of the township, may not know about its possibilities and resources. Nnana from River Park, for example, only got to know San Kopano when she accompanied me to visit Thabo.

The most common connections created at San Kopano interlink politically active actors and established milieus in Alexandra and link them 'upwards' with government departments and politicians. There are entanglements across the township boundaries, for example to NGOs and activists from other townships, to companies in Sandton, and to actors from abroad. Nevertheless, they hardly reach, nearby suburbs. There are hardly any relations with civic organisations, politicians and ordinary urban dwellers from the formerly White-zoned and now desegregating suburbs. The apartheid legacy, the spatial heritage of racial segregation and economic inequality, thus still narrows the reach of networks and collaborations at San Kopano.

San Kopano is an example of a civic space which has the form of a firmly institutionalised, architectural space, yet civic spaces in Alexandra can also exist as social spaces in the making, as not-fully-existing, imagined spaces, which nevertheless direct collective action towards a shared goal. In 2010, a group of about twelve to fifteen mostly unemployed men in their twenties created a garden, the Gcwala s'Bahle Garden Project, in a new section of Alexandra, the Far East Bank. They constructed the garden on an empty piece of land which used to serve as a scrapyard. When I met them, they were dreaming about putting up a large tent across the garden, and they hoped to construct a stage where they and other youth groups could hold theatre productions. They imagined that political meetings which were taking place on neighbourhood streets could be moved into the garden. Next to the garden they established a car wash on empty land from which they earned some money. Like many young people in Alex, they were engaged in diverse activities like volunteering for community patrols with the police and participation in a government work programme, as well as theatre, music and dance. Spaces to practice such activities were scarce, and they could hardly

afford to rent a room at a community centre like San Kopano. Hence, they dreamed of turning their garden into their own community centre.

Occupation of spaces which are not occupied by others – like a scrapyard – is hence an important strategy for youth groups in Alexandra to achieve control over space. Justine Lucas and other researchers have shown that political organisations in Alexandra establish political power and legitimacy by seeking to control access to space, especially housing (Lucas 1995). What has been less documented, though, is that seeking control over imagined civic spaces is an important route to achieving legitimacy; a route often sought by young urban dwellers. A similar example is a building called Tourism Hub, which was occupied by a youth group called Alpoa Youth from 2011 to 2013. Alpoa Youth is the youth branch of the organisation Alpoa, which aims to represent the interests of the former property-owning families. The Tourism Hub is a building on the south-eastern border of the Jukskei River containing a few rooms, a half-open hall and a stage surrounded by stone tables and benches. The construction of the Tourism Hub was funded by wealthy individuals and it was intended to serve as a community centre. However, there were ambiguities about which civic or government entity was entitled to administer it, which is why it stood empty for a long time; a 'white elephant' as it was referred to locally. In 2011, the ARP was formally in charge of it, and organised private security personnel to look after the building, while it was still planning how to use it.

In 2011, the then secretary of Alpoa Youth was living next to the Tourism Hub in an area called the 'TB Settlement' because there had once been a tuberculosis clinic there. He obtained the keys from the security personnel and for about two years, Alpoa Youth turned itself into the custodian of the space, claiming it to be a "space for the youth of Alexandra" (Patrick Baloyi, secretary of Alpoa Youth, March 2011). The ARP did not approve of the 'white elephant' becoming the headquarters of the youth group, yet it did not take action against them. Alpoa Youth started to organise music events for the youth (for example the 'land restoration hip hop session') and held all their meetings there. Some of the members spent their days at the Hub, giving them some everyday routine and a reason to leave their cramped homes. Here they socialised with their friends and strategised about activities. The secretary of Alpoa Youth turned one of the rooms into his private fitness studio where he used to lift weights. Alpoa Youth also rented the large facility out to churches and for private parties, and with the money they paid the phone and internet bills and other expenses.

In 2012, a conflict emerged with the residents' association of the adjoining neighbourhood section, the TB Settlement Committee. The Committee criticised the youth group for enriching itself by renting out the facilities, wanting to gain control of the space itself. In a conversation, one of the exponents of the committee, Kwanele, explained their plans for the place:

> We want to apply for government funds, so that we can employ people from the community as cleaners and receptionists. I can come here every day and look after the place, but I need to earn something, I need a salary (Kwanele, a 30-something member of the TB settlement committee, June 2012).

This statement makes clear that the conflict around the Tourism Hub was not least about the possibility of turning it into a source of employment, showing how control over space is an important strategy for economic survival in the township. It also had

a political dimension, however; at the same time, Alpoa Youth launched a petition to disband the ARP, strongly criticising it for having failed to develop the township. By appropriating a building that was the responsibility of the urban renewal project, the ARP, Alpoa Youth aimed to challenge the legitimacy of ARP as the development actor in the township, and they hence suspected that the ARP had told the TB settlement committee to challenge theirs. Control over space in Alexandra is always a quest for power.

In different yards in the township, towards five or six o'clock in the evenings, young people set up music boxes and a loud beat starts to fill the early evening air. In these yards, young people study fast, exhaustive dance choreographies which they called *kwassa kwassa* at that time. In 2011, there were seven or eight *kwassa kwassa* groups in Alexandra according to the 27-year-old leader of ABCDE (leader the of *kwassa kwassa* group, March 2011). In the early evenings, green fields in Jukskei Park and semi-private spaces like yards, sometimes only a few metres square, become transformed into stages where young people train for theatre productions, music performances or dance competitions. These self-organised and mostly underfunded youth groups constitute part of the diverse, large landscape of arts and sports in Alex, compensating partly for the lack of such facilities in the badly equipped public schools. Children and youth between eight and about twenty years old participate in these spaces of sociability and physical exercise.

Many of these youth groups are founded and organised by older youth in their 20s and 30s. A coach of one such *kwassa kwassa* group had succeeded to getting a good job outside Alexandra and wanted to 'give something back', as he explained to me (March 2011). In Alexandra, such youth spaces are usually represented by young people and adults alike as spaces of activity, where the youth are kept busy. Idleness, according to the township residents, seduces the youth to become involved in socially and morally wrong activities like crime and drug abuse. "You have to be creative; you have to do different things to survive here. You have to keep yourself busy" (a 25-year-old member of Gcwala s'Bahle Food Garden Project, February 2011).

Unemployment in South Africa is the highest among the youth. Growing up in Alexandra and living there as a young person is anything but easy. When young people leave school, they enter a social void. There are scholarships available for further education, but one needs the cultural capital of knowing how to apply for them and also high grades, which are difficult to achieve in Alexandra's schools notorious for their low matric pass rates. Simone argues that: "Without any prospect of employment, there is no platform to signal progression from youth to adulthood, like likelihood of viable social reproduction – of family, cultural value, memory" (Simone 2005a: 323, see also Honwana 2012).

Creating and participating in youth spaces of sociability and physical exercise is therefore an important route for young people to avoid idleness, to 'keep busy'. While some youth may spend their free time at the church or in such civic youth spaces, others again party. Alexandra has always had a very vibrant nightlife. The many different places to hangout socially invite one to spend the nights dancing and the days recovering from *babalaza* (hangover). If one lacks money to buy beer in these public places, one can get cheap and easy access to all kinds of drugs and consume them with friends at the home of somebody who has a shack or a room. The boundary between joyful partying, drug abuse and drug addiction, however, is a slippery one. Many young men in their thirties whom I met during fieldwork told me about a phase in their life (mostly

the years after school) in which they became heavily involved in drugs and crime. The desire for consumer goods felt by themselves and their girlfriends, anger at Whites in the context of crumbling apartheid and the search for friendship, parties and fun were among the reasons why young men chose to become involved with criminal gangs. They eventually left these gangs either because they were arrested or because some of the gang members were shot, and very often both.

Civic spaces for the youth like the *kwassa kwassa* dance classes are often talked about in the township within frames like morality and health. In contrast to the stigmatised teenage pregnancy and the 'bad' drug and crime lifestyle, activities like the *kwassa kwassa*, or the Alpoa Youth group or the food garden project were portrayed by the young people as morally good spaces that were supposed to protect the participants from the 'bad' out there. They presented them as places where they were safe from 'bad' influences and could learn from the older ones who had survived their difficult life phases. In contrast to the 'rational leisure' described by Burgess (2005), for example boys scout, which is organised from above (the powerful, the adults) in order to educate youth to show discipline and respect, the youth groups in Alexandra are organised bottom up, by the young people themselves or by young adults in their thirties.

Not least because of this perception of civic youth spaces as 'morally good' and educative, the *kwassa kwassa* groups receive high acceptance in the neighbourhood. The yard neighbours where the youth train tend put up with the loud beat of the music and many watch the training sessions. Some neighbours explain that they accept the youth groups in their yards because, for example, "it prevents things", as one neighbour told me (neighbour *kwassa kwassa* training ground, March 2011). In lived reality, though, boundaries between 'good' sports and arts and 'bad' drug lifestyles are not so clear. Sometimes participants of a *kwassa kwassa* group smoke *dagga* (marihuana) in a hidden corner of the yard before they show up for the training session. On Sundays and Mondays, the young men of the Alpoa Youth and the food garden project were hard to find, as they were usually recovering from a *babalaza* (hangover) from the weekend. Nevertheless, the youth spaces which they had created for themselves provided them with some structure to their days and weeks, so that they had a reason to stop partying when the weekend was over. These spaces, which are considered socially legitimate in the township, provided spaces of sociability for the youth as well as routes for these young people to become someone socially.

Alex at Night: Of Conspicuous Consumption and Nostalgia

Alexandra is home to many different milieus and spaces, and it is also marked by different rhythms across the day and the week. Urban dwellers are always on the move, and their daily lives produce urban rhythms (Hahn 2012: 18). In early mornings and at dawn commuters fill the streets of Alexandra, recognisable by their work clothes, either the business attire of those who work in the service industry or, typically, the blue overalls of those who are on their way to a job in industry or a suburban house. During the day and after rush hour, urban dwellers transform the streets from spaces of transport to spaces of multiple practices like hanging around, playing cards, selling things, socialising, observing others or playing soccer. Friday is the busiest and most hectic day, and, as many get their salary on Friday, people say that Friday is the

day of heavy drinking, fighting, domestic violence and assaults on workers returning home with the salary in their pocket. During the day on Sundays, the streets are very quiet except for people on their way to church and the sound of the many church choirs chanting in small houses and garages. Sunday night, though, is the big party night in the township, followed by Monday, the day of *babalaza* (hangover).

Alexandra has a lively and diversified nightlife culture. Differences in age, income and lifestyle preferences create the demand necessary to sustain the diversity of simple shebeens/taverns, *shisanyamas* (places where meat is barbequed) as well as sophisticated bars and nightclubs. Nightlife spaces in Alexandra have a distinct weekly rhythm: many of the drinking places where young people socialise are open every day, but they only fill up on one specific day of the week. On Sunday, young people assemble at Joe's Butchery, on Monday, one goes out at Chicks, on one of the other nights one can go to the Heritage corner and on Friday, if one has enough cash, one can go clubbing at the elitist, luxurious club *Neh!* in nearby Marlboro.

Gender, age and income are important determinants for access to such leisure spaces. Married women, people who lead a religious lifestyle and avoid alcohol, and poor people, who do not have wealthy friends or lovers, seldom frequent such places. While young men are often not subject to much parental control in the township, young women told me that they had to sneak out of their parents' houses at night to go clubbing. Places like Chicks and Joe's Butchery, where the party takes place on the street, are infamous for violent fights and shoot-outs. Also, gang leaders are said to hang out at such places. These places belong to the key spaces in Alexandra where entanglements across spaces and lifeworlds become formed; where otherwise separate lives become enmeshed in one place, confronted with each other.

On Monday nights, the southern section of 15th Avenue is transformed into a night space called, amongst others, 'Chicks'. Youth and young professionals between 20 and 40 years old from diverse townships and suburban areas mingle here, drink beer or cider, chat, observe and enjoy being observed. The heavy smell of tripe fills the night air and the atmosphere is marked by the humming beats of deep house, an electronic music style which at the time of research had largely replaced kwaito as the most popular genre in the township hang out places. The name 'Chicks' stems from the nickname of the owner. The owner of the place started it about 10 years earlier by selling *mogudu* (tripe), a favoured township delicacy, and young people used to sit on the steps to eat it. With time, the social gatherings became larger and by 2012 had turned into one of the most famous party hangouts with a reputation across the entire city.

Professionals and managers working in Sandton offices bump into each other here. Going out clubbing in townships is a fashionable trend among the black middle class in the city. Those unfamiliar with township spaces can be recognised by their lack of *street wisdom*, e.g. women who handle their handbags and cell phones carelessly, or who wear high heels, unsuited to the rough township street. At the beginning of the night, before the street is closed off with fences so that customers cannot bring alcohol from outside, cars make their way through the crowd. Nobody takes 15th Avenue on Monday nights accidentally; rather they do it to show off their cars. The latest German cars, their drivers sometimes holding whisky glasses in their hand, and even large motorbikes are showcased here. People say that sometimes one can even see Lamborghinis and Porsches. Places like Chicks are understood by Alexandra residents as spaces where those who moved out of the township come back in order to show off their wealth.

Many people moved out of Alexandra to the suburbs, but they continue coming here. People who move away miss Alex. They become nostalgic. And they come here to show off (Thabo Mopasi, a 40-year-old member of long-term tenant milieu and field assistant, February 2011).

Veblen called such practices *conspicuous consumption* (Veblen 2000 [1899]), meaning the consumption of luxury goods and participation in luxury leisure activities in order to display social status and wealth. Chicks is not only about display, though, it is also about the complex politics of redistribution, the creation of patrimonial ties and transactional sex: wealthy men buy drinks for their less affluent friends, relatives, employees or potential girlfriends, awaiting favours in return.

"Johannesburg is about money", I was repeatedly told during fieldwork, as did a friend working as an assistant at a large South African company in Rosebank (Gaby, my 'host mother', resident of Orange Grove, February 2011). When I was staying at Gaby's house for a couple of months, I was driving a VW golf from the 1980s in a particularly ugly yellowish colour; friends repeatedly told me that while it was wise to drive such a car in a city prone to car hijacking, it was also uncool. "Your car is a statement" Gaby repeatedly told me. Many middle-class people spend their income on branded clothing and the latest German car, mostly on credit. Some people say that Alexandra residents who managed to get a middle-class job continue to live in a shack on purpose, so that they can spend their money on the monthly instalments for their car. "Everything is about being shiny and glittery. People don't buy bags or clothes where you don't see the brand. Everything needs to have a brand" (Gaby, February 2011). For Gaby, this also meant significant social pressure. She had decided against brands and a shiny house as she preferred not to get herself into debt. "But most people don't think like that here, Johannesburg lives on credit." She said repeatedly that she didn't have many friends because of her choices. The social pressure to consume, and the feeling that one becomes socially excluded and does not fully belong if one does not participate in the consumption hysteria is typical of people like Gaby who want to be part of the middle-class suburban lifestyle, but whose salaries of about R20,000 before tax (2012) are too low to get a credit for all the status symbols of a middle-class lifestyle, namely a house, a car, private schooling, brand clothing and going out to fancy places. Debt is then a considerable problem for many people.

The club and restaurant *Neh!* are much more chic than Chicks. Its interior design looks like any nightclub in Johannesburg's northern suburbs. Its location in Marlboro (a former industrial area next to Alexandra) and the stunning views onto Alexandra's skyline, however, ground it in the township. On Sundays, *Neh!* becomes a meeting place for established, affluent men in their forties and fifties. They grew up in the townships under apartheid and managed to get into very high-level positions thereafter; they belong to a generation who, after the abolishment of racist laws and Bantu education, profited from affirmative action policies (Employment Equity Act, 1998, Modisha 2008, Seekings and Nattrass 2005: 308-313). The term 'black diamonds' was introduced by the marketing industry to describe this black middle class (Southall 2016). These top manager at large South African companies spend their Sunday afternoons on the golf course, and then come to *Neh!* in the evening for a beer, sitting on the veranda overlooking the sea of shacks and cramped houses that is Alexandra. They have replaced their office suits with polo shorts and golf shorts. One of them told me

that as a child he used to walk past the large houses in the suburbs and wonder: "Why do we not have this?" (Jabulani, a 45-year-old former Alexandra resident, March 2011). Now he lived there himself. After saying that to me, he called the waiter and complained that the table cloth was damp.

At club *Neh!* Alexandra becomes the object of a nostalgic gaze by those who left this lifeworld behind. The Swiss doctor Johannes Hoffer defined the term 'nostalgia' in 1688 as meaning the "longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed" (Dlamini 2010: 15). The nostalgia celebrated at *Neh!* constitutes what the journalist and novelist Jacob Dlamini calls 'reflective nostalgia'; a nostalgia that is self-aware and combines critical reflection with affective memory (ibid: 1, based on Boym 2001). What these successful men are nostalgic about are images of the township way of life to which they would not like to return, but which they nevertheless miss nostalgically, and which decisively shaped their sense of belonging.

Conclusion: Entangled Spaces, Entangled Lives

With the transformation of Johannesburg from a Fordist to a post-Fordist city, and the development of edge cities, gated communities and shopping malls, there are striking similarities with other 'postmodern' cities like Los Angeles. It is not surprising, then, that theories developed in the Los Angeles school of postmodern urbanism have been carried over into writings about Johannesburg, so that the city has become framed theoretically as quite distinct from other African cities. Most prominently, Murray (2004) argued that Johannesburg is a 'late-developing', world-class status aspiring city which has become, like São Paulo, incorporated into global circuits of trade and investment. This has led, coupled with local dynamics, to the spatial outcomes typical of postmodern urbanism like socio-spatial fragmentation and polarisation. According to Murray the "spatial dynamics of postmodern urbanism have produced an urban landscape carved into fragments, disconnected 'micro-worlds' cut off from one another" (ibid: 142). While the urban landscape has come to "resemble the glitz and glamour of the 'first world' … the poor and marginalised are pushed aside, allowed to languish in poverty and destitution in impoverished ghettoes in the 'in-between' places of the city" (ibid: 158).

The aim of this chapter was to interrogate and unmake this representation. The ethnography of Alexandra deeply challenges the 'mosaic' vision of community and neighbourhood by highlighting the complexity of one space and its entanglements within and beyond. Indeed, life is harsh in Alexandra, which is also reflected in what Lefebvre called the conceived dimension of space, namely, how urban dwellers, politicians and academics talk about the township, mostly as a 'problem to be solved'. This representation of the township as a problem is grounded in the everyday experience of lack of space, dirt and other oppressing structural conditions. Looking at Alexandra through this lens, outside observers might regard it as a 'ghetto', a socially and spatially excluded area that is home to poor, marginalised and stigmatised city dwellers (Hutchison and Haynes 2012, Varady 2005, Wacquant 2008). As in many neighbourhoods at the social margins across the globe, young people in Alexandra have developed a specific subculture, appropriating the discourse of marginality and transforming it into a popular counterculture. *Gomorrah* emphasises the agency of Alexandra's

residents; it claims that growing up in the *ikazi* makes the urban dwellers especially strong and streetwise instead of stigmatised.

Nevertheless, this is far from being the only way Alexandra is experienced and imagined. There is also the narrative of Alexandra as a space of urban creativity; a neighbourhood where the lack of state control during apartheid and after made space for innovative forms of sociality, culture and economics. In order to party, people from other townships and suburbs travel to Alexandra's bars and clubs, transforming it into a centre for Johannesburg's night life. As a former freehold township, Alexandra has given rise to an influential property owning middle class. Although this milieu was dismantled by the apartheid state, it nevertheless continues to have significant political power in the township. Calling Alexandra an 'in-between' place as Murray does implies that it is somehow 'outside' the proper city. Yet, in political terms in particular, Alexandra has actually been a political centre for the city and even the nation; it is the point of origin of many influential political movements, phenomena and actors. The discourse of Alexandra as a struggle monument draws attention to the fact that Alexandra was a central stage for the different phases of political resistance against the apartheid state. With pride, residents list the many Alexandra politicians who came to shape the provincial and even national politics; for example, Obed Bapela who, in 2010, became a member of Zuma's cabinet. Also, less glorious aspects of South African recent urban history are linked to Alexandra. The xenophobic attacks of 2008 started in Alexandra and then turned into region-wide upheaval resulting in tens of thousands of people being internally displaced. Alexandra is thus not only a spatial entity in the city, but also social imagery, constructed as multiple narratives and multiple worlds in a continuous process of social, cultural and political imagination and articulation.

Notions like ghettos and slum imply that the residents of an area are homogenously poor; they tend to be associated with the idea of an isomorphism of place and the social characteristics of the residents. Yet the population and everyday life in the township are highly differentiated, marked by considerable diversity and inequality. The constant influx of newcomers into Alexandra over the last century has led to very high residential mobility, high densities and tensions around scarce resources like housing and electricity. In these conflicts, milieu differences become articulated as social categories and are instrumentalised to legitimate and delegitimise claims to access to limited urban resources. The drawing of boundaries has shifted historically and situationally, but they tend to revolve around landlord–tenant relations, distinctions between informal and formal (or legal and illegal), as well as insider–outsider distinctions based on national citizenship as well as shifting notions of urban citizenship. Also, the xenophobic politics need to be understood within the historical context of ever-shifting boundaries of insider and outsider divisions.

Urban studies in Africa recognise a long trend of network approaches, starting with the Manchester scholars and including writers like Simone and the latest assemblage notions (McFarlane 2011). Network studies with their discourse of fluidity and interconnections tend to neglect the power of geographical space like spatial boundaries and questions of geographical accessibility, while privileging relational spaces of networks and connections. It has even been claimed that "African identities display a remarkable capacity not to need fixed places" (Gotz and Simone 2003: 125, quoted in Bank 2011: 16-7). Yet the emotional connection to land and the politics of land are highly constitutive for Alexandra. Everyday life is characterised by opposing tensions,

namely, the oppressive structural conditions inscribed in space versus the agency and creativity of urban dwellers in resisting, appropriating and transcending them; the tension between the power of marginalisation and spatial boundaries versus the spatial and social mobility and flexibility of the residents; the tension between the everyday experience of conflict, violence, anonymity and social isolation versus cosmopolitanism, dense social networks and mutual help; the everyday experience of hardship and suffering versus the joy of dense sociality, of leisure and cultural production. Bank hence rightfully warns that we need to "be careful not to over-emphasise mobility and movement and the inability of urban Africans to become grounded in the cities and neighbourhoods within which they live" (Bank 2011: 16).

Alexandra is not a disconnected micro-world but is entangled with other places in manifold and complex ways, as the following chapters will develop in more detail. Alexandra has always been and still is tightly integrated and interdependent with the surrounding city. It is embedded in complex social, cultural and economic connections with the surrounding suburbs, as well as with other cities and faraway rural homes in South Africa and other countries (ibid: 14). Although this chapter has focused on spaces within Alexandra, it has shown such connections beyond its geographical boundaries. Economically, the township is deeply entangled with the surrounding suburbs and affluent areas like Sandton. Important agents of connection are also the aspiring middle-class milieus that have moved out or aspire to move out of the township. In addition, many newcomer milieus connect the township through faraway places like rural homes in South Africa and elsewhere, by circulating between them. Places like the assemblage San Kopano are key spaces where residents from diverse milieus find resources that enable them to circulate across boundaries and where actors from outside like NGOs, academics and tourists become connected to the township. The legacy of the apartheid geography still limits these connections, however, which can be seen in the absence of links to political organisations in nearby suburbs. Entanglements further involve the most intimate spheres of life like hygiene and family relations.

Neighbourhoods hence need to be understood in relation to other urban areas and the city at large, and not in isolation (Castañeda 2012: 160). Alexandra only comes into being through connections, boundaries and interdependencies between residents of different milieus and neighbourhoods. To understand urbanism in cities characterised by segregation, there is therefore a need to study the "complicity, co-operation, boundary-crossing, interpenetration, affiliation and divergence which 'come and go' across the city, its neighbourhoods and its facets" (Simone 2001: 61). The different social worlds in the city are not unconnected, segregation is never complete. We need to empirically investigate the degree and quality of entanglements, instead of reproducing narratives of urban duality and dichotomies. This is what *cities of entanglements* aims to do.
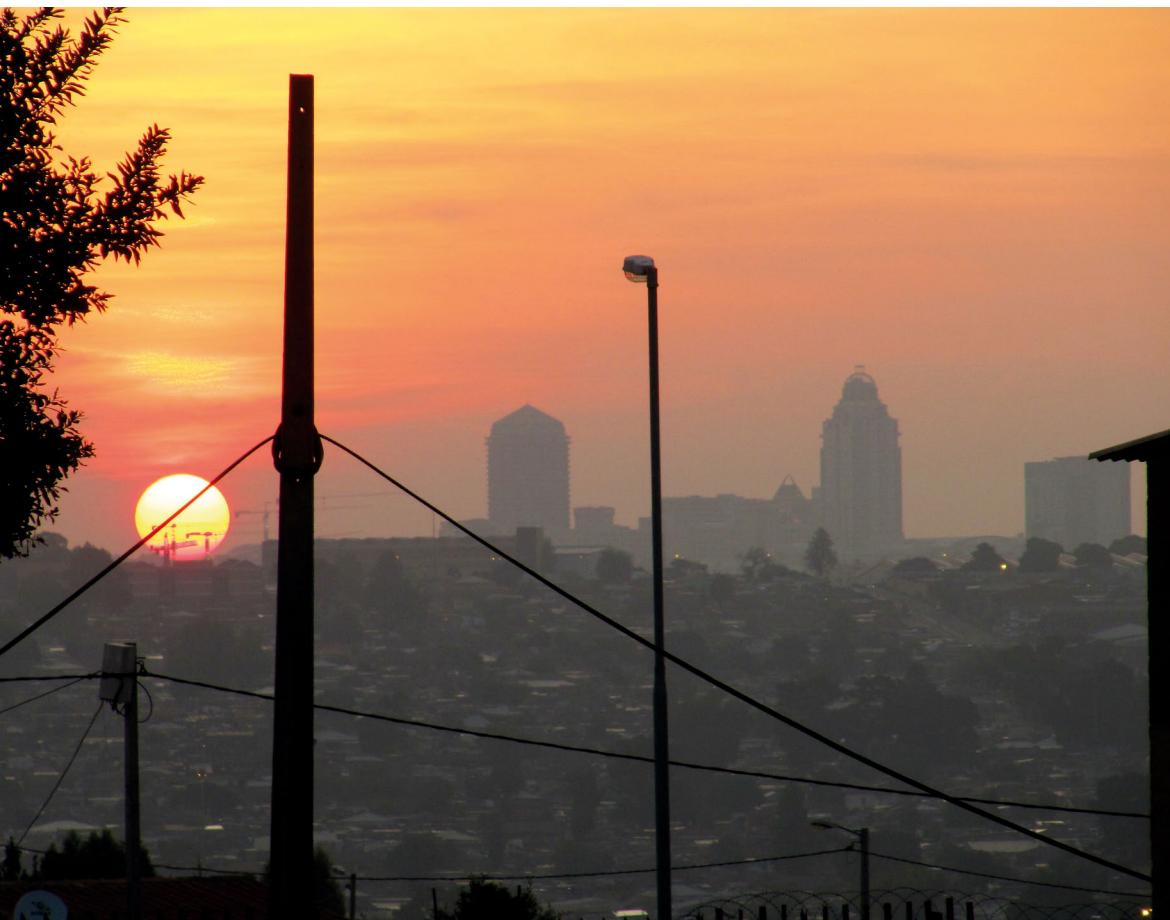
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