

# Exploring Neighbourliness and Social Cohesion in Two Residential Gated Developments in Johannesburg, South Africa

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## 1 ABSTRACT

The growth of privatised residential territories through the concept of ‘gating’ has become a global phenomenon and a distinct feature of the urban landscape of cities. There has been much debate around their existence. Justifications for these developments have been largely associated to the fear of crime, the expressed need for a defensible space, ineffective security provisions by government institutions, a search for an enhanced residential lifestyle and inadequate municipal service provision and governance. In the South African context, it has been argued that they have generated a “neo-apartheid” and serve as a façade, concealing the elitism and privilege that they offer residents. Similarly, questions have been raised around the benefits of living in a gated community, including whether or not they nurture or limit social cohesion among their residents. Current literature and studies on gated communities tends to focus on their physical form and function with little emphasis on the internal dynamics that take place within such developments. Given the growth and popularity of such developments in South African cities, the paper employs a qualitative approach using in-depth interviews with residents of two gated communities in Greenstone Hill to examine how living in a gated community influences daily social interactions among neighbours. The findings of the study identified four key themes that influenced social cohesion in the gated developments. Furthermore, contrary to expectations, interview data revealed that gated communities are socially diverse living spaces allowing for interactions of individuals from various cultural, religious, racial and class backgrounds which is unique given South Africa’s legacy of apartheid that has resulted in the persistence of residential segregation and mono-racial communities. The implications of the study are that these developments provide platforms for different races, classes, and cultures to unlearn past prejudices which has key implications in the process of re-building and uniting the country and its communities. The paper makes recommendation for gated communities to be viewed from a different perspective that focuses on their potential to contribute to social change and cohesion in the era of democracy.

Keywords: neighbourhood cohesion, neighbourliness, social cohesion, residential gated communities, South Africa

## 2 INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXTUALISATION

The growth of privatised residential territories through the concept of ‘gating’ has become a global phenomenon and a distinct feature of the urban landscape of cities. Gated developments, more commonly known as gated communities, originate from the United States; however, these developments, in various forms, have since proliferated in cities of many other developed and developing countries. Gated communities are privatised physical locations whose access is restricted by walls, fences, gates or booms that detach their communities from their surrounds (Liu and Song, 2017). Within the geographical scholarship and urban studies literature, increased attention to gated communities has spawned the development of a corpus of ‘critical’ literature documenting the global spread of the phenomenon. Global pressures of globalisation and the evolution of capitalist and neoliberal forces of “privatism” have been largely associated with their growth and popularity in the twenty-first century (Pow, 2014). Other justifications for these developments cited in literature include the fear of crime, the expressed need for a defensible space, ineffective security provisions by government institutions, and search for an enhanced residential lifestyle and inadequate municipal service provision and governance outside the gates (Landman, 2003; Lemanski et al., 2008; Roitman, 2011, Tanulku, 2012).

In the context of South Africa, “gating” presents a unique challenge given the country’s legacy of apartheid. They are critiqued for generating a ‘neo-apartheid’ in the city where segregation takes place not only on the grounds of race but also on the economy of space and market ethos (Ramoroka and Tsheola, 2014). Here,

division based on status, exclusivity and social class takes centre stage, facades of privilege and elitism are dividing social groups. and the city is divided into “civilised zones and savage zones” (Santos, 2007). These developments have transformed the social, economic and political context of our South African cities by re-ordering and re-organising the micro-society of space (Landman, 2012) and have consequently re-defined the spaces in which communities interact. Gated communities have also been greatly critiqued in literature for becoming sources of segregation, social divergence and the breakdown of society. Additionally, it can be argued that these gated communities are a paradox as they thrive in a country rooted in the tenets of ubuntu and social cohesion in an effort to undo the injustices resulting from colonial and apartheid rule and nation-building at multi-levels of society. Furthermore, these developments have been greatly critiqued for constructing undemocratic spaces that tend to weaken social cohesion and community building. In a country such as South Africa, that formally encourages inclusion and equality, it is important to research spatial practices that appear to contradict such values and principles. Various scholars in literature (Pow, 2015) suggest that there is a tendency for urban researchers to focus on the visual form and topology of gating without paying close attention to their underlying functions and diverse social meanings and symbolism. Some scholars (Low, 2003; Salcedo and Torres, 2004) have however mentioned that gated communities have the potential to promote social integration and impact society positively by providing employment for surrounding communities and allow for social mixing that can result in opportunities for social interaction between different social groups, therefore diminishing the scale of segregation. As research develops in this field, there is much interest about the community behind the gates. In fact, the term ‘gated community’ incites enquiry about what type of “community” is being referred to in this expression and how they (gated developments) build their “community”. There remains a lack of research on the internal socio-spatial configurations, complex realities and social life of their inhabitants. The paper aims to address this gap by exploring neighbourliness and social cohesion in two socially diverse residential gated communities in Greenstone Hill, Johannesburg South Africa. The intention is to understand how gated living influences residents’ everyday social interactions and relations among their neighbours.

### 3 LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 3.1 Neighbourliness and Social Cohesion

Neighbourliness and social interactions in the neighbourhoods are a part of everyday life for all citizens of contemporary urban societies. Various concepts have been employed to investigate social interactions within residential areas in different parts of the globe namely: social capital (Putnam, 1993,1995,2007), neighbouring (Filipovic, 2008;Guest and Wierzbicki, 1999) and sense of community (Lupi and Musterd, 2006). This study employed the concept of social cohesion to unpack the neighbourly relations and interactions that occur in the everyday lives of residential gated community residents. The concept of social cohesion is very broad and has also been regarded as a “quasi-concept” (Bernard 1999; Jenson 2002; 2010) due to its ability to be retrofitted in various disciplines and factors such as community development, nation-building, societal well-being and diversity to mention a few (Bidandi, Roman, Davids and Khaile, 2021). That is, it can take on different conceptual meanings as well as practices in relation to its contextual needs and demands. It has been a subject of global importance and debated by academic and policy makers since the late 19th century. From an international perspective, social cohesion emerged out of literature of social capital and was introduced as one aspect of social capital (see Putman 1993, 2001). Since then the concept has been widely used in the international policy environment and also embedded within forums such as the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the European Union (EU), the World Bank, the Club of Rome and the Canadian federal government since the 1990s (Barolsky,2016).

Due to the broad nature of the concept, there is no single definition that applies to it. For instance, Putnam (2000) defined social cohesion as the “glue” that binds individuals together and permits the pursuit of collective goals. On the other hand, Forrest and Kearns (2000) affirm that it is the need for a shared sense of morality and common purpose and a social order that indicates the quality of social relations and interactions within communities or families or a sense of belonging to a place. Forrest and Kearns (2000) were also very influential in applying the concept to the neighbourhood scale and identified five key dimensions in defining social cohesion namely: common values, social order and social control, social solidarity, social networks, place attachment and identity. These are the dimensions that were adopted in this study. In the context of South Africa, social cohesion is particularly important to address the scourge of a socially divided society.

Lukhele (2018) explains that this is because social cohesion at neighbourhood level allows for the social fabric of communities to hold together despite specialised roles, economic inequality and differences in social status and class. Palmary (2015) points to the fact that social cohesion in South Africa is largely treated as being synonymous with nation building and is primarily focused at the national scale instead of the local/community level which is mostly common in the way it is referred in international literature. She explains that in South Africa social cohesion is "seen as precisely a response to, and remedy for, the effects of a racist and otherwise exclusionary past" (ibid, 2015:64). Additionally, the term was initially aligned to the arts, culture and heritage sectors from 2004 onwards. However its ideological roots are also located within the "African humanism" and "Ubuntu" framework (see for example Mbeki, 1996; Tutu, 2000; Mbembe, 2011).

### 3.2 Residential Gated Communities: Definitions, Typology and Social Implications

Internationally, literature pertaining to gated communities has its origins in the USA and can be traced back to the master-planning of retirement housing developments during the 1970s (Bodnar and Molnar, 2011; Breetzke, Landman and Cohn, 2014). It was not until the late 1990s that these developments also gained popularity in South African cities/ Since then these developments have taken centre stage in most new developments in these cities. not only in South Africa but globally and have become a key feature of the 21st century (Landman, 2010). The justifications for such developments, outlined in literature (Nasution and Zahrah, 2015; Ramoroka and Tsheola, 2014; Landman, 2002; Breetzke et al, 2014; Tibbalds, 2001; Lemanski, 2004; Blakely and Snyder, 1998) is the fear of crime, for providing an improved quality of life, as well as the need for privacy, exclusivity and convenience. Moreso, Lemanski (2004) highlight that these developments are also born out of not-in-my-backyard mentalities. Therefore, one can refer to these gated communities and developments as defence mechanisms and a way to relieve fear of the outside "world", similar to the walls and moats during the medieval times to restrict trespassers from access (Mitchell, 1995; Landman, 2010).

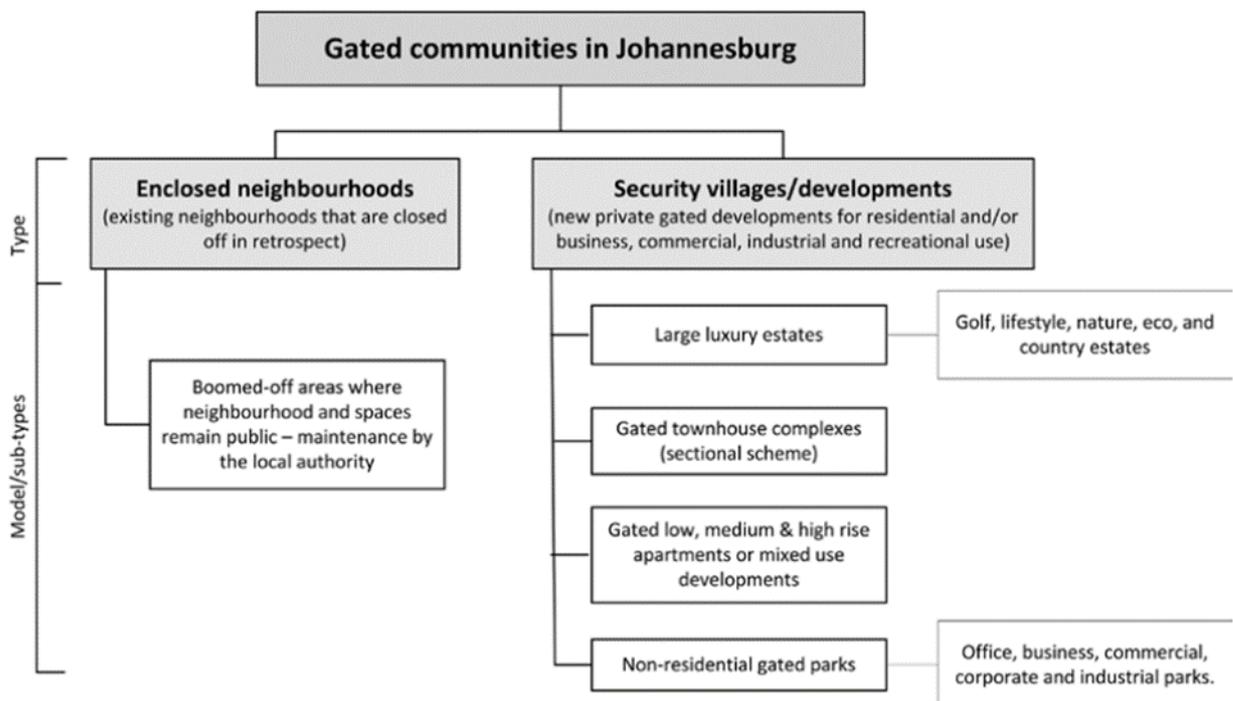


Fig 1: Gated communities in Johannesburg Typology (Source: Landman and Badenhorst, 2012)

Although, Obeng-Odoom, El Hadary and Jang (2014) argue that even though these walls exist some residents of such developments have expressed still feeling insecure as a result of crime which could take place within the walls. Another issue relating to this in accordance with Landman (2000) is response times for emergencies as police and other emergency departments need to access through these gates in order to reach a house within these gated developments. Gated developments have been defined as being "residential areas with restricted access such that normally public spaces have been privatised" (Blakely and Snyder, 1997:1). Similarly, Landman (2010) perceives gated communities as being physical locations that have walls

or fences which have detached them from their surrounds and also have gates/booms which restrict access into these locations and as a result the public spaces within these developments are privatised. From this definition the key characteristics of these type of developments can be identified as having physical barriers and walls with gates or security-controlled entrances which are privately managed. Furthermore, Iiesanmi (2012) outlined other classifications for gated communities as having technological barriers (surveillance cameras, alarms and swipe access); manned barriers (security guards); physical features (speed humps and signage); and natural surveillance (“eyes on the street”). Blakely and Snyder, (1997) have outlined that the three main categories of gated communities are security zones, elite communities and lifestyle communities. Although different countries have developed different terms and forms for these, they all find themselves within these categories. For example, in China they are state-led private neighbourhoods, in the USA they are common interest developments and in the Middle East they are referred to as traditional gating (Iiesanmi, 2012). In South Africa, gating takes place in both new and existing developments and according to Landman and Badenhorst (2012) the typology of gated developments in Johannesburg is categorised in the following way (see Fig 1):

Contemporary South African cities are bounded spaces. This is attributed to the fact that settlement and building fortification and segregation have a long history given the country’s colonial and apartheid legacy dating back to the military forts and ‘laagers’ of Cape Town castle and the Group Area Act of 1950 (Landman,2010). The principles of apartheid were focused on the segregation of space based on race and thus “produced a set of practices concerned with boundaries between categories that it conceived” (ibid:53). Gated communities in South Africa have been critiqued for upholding this ‘border mentality’ in the post-apartheid state, as gated spaces reproduce such boundaries defining who belongs and who doesn’t and utilising various strategies to demarcate separate territories. In addition, racism, exclusivity, power and more are concerns surrounding gated communities. Motivations for moving into gated developments in South Africa have revolved around crime and the desire to be free from the anxieties associated with city life (Hook and Vrdoljak, 2002; Ballard, 2004; Durlington and Slover, 2006; Lemanski, 2006; Ballard and Jones, 2011). The governance of these private developments is managed privately through a residence association or body corporate which control administration and rule enforcement within these developments (Roitman, 2005). The social behaviour and the regulations regarding construction are guided by a code of conduct that has been formulated by the residence association (Roitman, 2005).

Gated communities have been vilified as vessels of segregation such that the residents of gated enclaves have been often characterised as “anti-social urban elites” (Pow,2015:477) who turn their back on society and lead gated minds and gated lives and in the South African context, have a racist fear of difference (Lemanski, 2004; Brunn, 2006). In fact, Mantey (2017) argues that the term ‘gated community’ should be replaced by gated estate, as gated developments with a high sense of community among its residence does not necessarily result from frequent neighbourly interaction but instead from the “design and aesthetic uniformity” (ibid:153). Furthermore, Walks (2010) outlines that these gated enclaves represent a process of ‘civic secession’ whereby residents wall themselves off from the problems of contemporary society, thus avoiding responsibility for the plight of others whether within or outside the gates. Contrary to the above, some scholars (Lang and Danielson 1997; Blandy and Lister 2005; Serife 2007) believe the sense of community and social ties are higher in gated enclaves than in non-gated developments due to the similarity of income and interests among residents. Thus, they are providing a premise for weakened social ties with people outside the gates within surrounding communities. The suggested effects that gated communities have on society in general from a social, spatial, political and economic perspective as well as the various dilemmas they perpetuate, makes them a significant area of research. Housing is at the core of social life, more specifically with reference to “how and where people are housed” (Stone and Hulse, 2007:1). Li et al, (2012) note that different types of neighbourhoods have different experiences in terms of neighbourliness, and it has been noted that very little is known about the link between different typologies of housing, housing design, urban form and social cohesion. Similarly, research on gated communities and their effect on social cohesion and neighbourliness in the experiences of the residents appears to be minimal.

In literature, gated communities are said to have various social advantages that have a positive effect on the social interactions and cohesion of their communities. These include the safe, clean and private space they offer their residents (Tanulku, 2011), the communal leisure amenities (Kenna, 2010) and the exclusivity they provide (Hook and Vrdoljak, 2002). In fact, Blandy and Lister (2005) in their study of gating in England

found that it is because of reasons related to those previously mentioned, that social interaction and neighbourliness in gated communities is higher than in comparison to a non-gated community. Furthermore, heightened security also provides a platform for residents to feel more at ease in their communities and often leads to increased interaction and sense of community, compared to residential areas with less security (Lemanski et al.,2008). The size of the gated community is also said to have an influence on the social functions as those that have large number of homes are more likely to have facilities such as club houses and swimming pools that can facilitate social interaction (Grant and Mittlesteadt, 2004). Additionally, larger gated communities such as Steyn City are incorporating increased mix of land uses and social infrastructure within gated communities in such a way that outcomes of such practices could be the greater withdrawal of gated community residents among communities outside the gates.

#### 4 METHODOLOGY

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

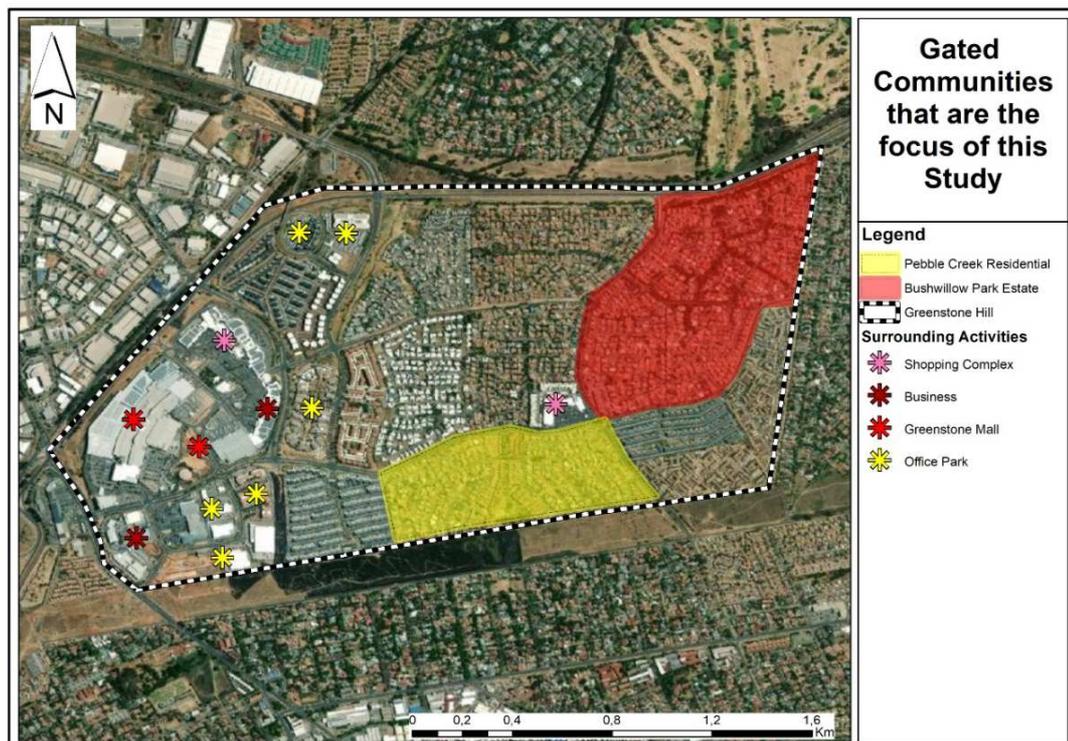


Fig. 2: Residential gated communities' locality and housing typologies

The types of gated communities that are in Greenstone Hill can be seen in the images below.

Greenstone Hill is a residential suburb located in the north-east of the City of Johannesburg within Region E. Although the history of this residential suburb is not well documented, it is new and was initially green belt land which was transformed into the spatial expressions of privately driven city building. The area is commonly referred to as Greenstone and is a diverse space made up of secured business parks, warehouse

complexes, shopping malls, townhouse complexes and gated residential communities with free-standing houses.



Fig. 3: Housing typology in Pebble Creek Estate and Bushwillow Park Estate, Johannesburg

## 5 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Whilst the common idea is that elites are self-sufficient and do not require “street-level interpersonal relations and neighbourhood networks to meet their basic needs” (Harvey, 1985:262), people, including the elite in society, do not live in complete isolation from one another and their social lives are not immune to external influences and social networks. As such, people’s lives are linked and there is a form of interdependency between people and communities. An important consequence of social networks is that potential for people within them to act as a group to pursue shared goals by means of collective action. Neighbourly relations constitute part of our everyday life, and these informal social relations can either impact positively or negatively on social cohesion in a residential setting (Ruonavaara, 2021). In this sense, neighbours are members that residents interact with primarily because of the commonality of place of residence; in the context of the study this is the gated community. This section outlines results and presents the discussion based on the data collected to address the main purpose of this study.

### 5.1 Neighbourhood diversity and social interactions

Social interactions are a core part of what brings people together and are at the centre of community cohesion. In the context of a neighbourhood these social relations are commonly referred to as neighbourly relations that have been theorised as friendly distance comprising of mundane everyday social activities that neighbours engage in, such as borrowing tools, asking for help or visiting one another (Redshaw and Ingham, 2017). From observations and interviews with residents, social interactions within the gated communities range from superficial interactions to, in some instances, more deep social connections and friendship links. These superficial interactions were a result of what Van Eijk (2012) refers to as “chance

encounters” i.e., bumping into other neighbours in the common areas, driveways, etc. where brief forms of interaction occur. This is captured in the interview excerpt below from an interview with one of the residents “I mean most interactions amongst neighbours here start with a general wave, like hi and bye and in most cases it ends there or sometimes you can become good friends like one of our neighbours but mostly the interaction happens or rather starts in the driveway when someone is jogging by. also in the parks...there you obviously greet others to show that you are a decent human being. Some people are just generally rude though, so even if you want to greet or whatever you can already see from their body language that they have no interest in even that little hi or bye of yours and just makes you not greet them at all...so it depends really.”

The interview excerpt above provides an example of how initial interactions are usually brief among neighbours, the potential for these to develop into meaningful relationships and friendships is possible based on the willingness to engage. Interestingly, the above narrative also indicates that even these chance encounters can be negatively impacted by the experiences of the first interaction and indicates the link between social interaction and non-verbal behaviour. To this end, Arqoub and Alserhan (2019:308) statement can be appreciated that “our body speaks words, sentences, phrases, and punctuation” and this can either lead to positive or negative communication and interaction experiences. Additionally, this also indicates the relationship between chance encounters and the values of good neighbouring. Diversity in the gated community can take various forms namely: mixing of household types and tenures; occupations, income levels, race, ethnicities, birthplaces, languages and religious and cultural backgrounds (Wang and Kemeny, 2021; Talen, 2008). The consensus for a long time since the conception of gated communities in the US was that they were home to the white elite in society (Blakely and Snyder, 1997). However recent literature (Chipkin, 2012; Ballard, Jones and Ngwenya, 2021) on gated communities has indicated that trends of a growing black middle class has led to a diversity behind the gates and there is a greater racial integration within these spaces. This was particularly the case in the two gated communities. The residents’ experiences with diversity were generally positive and gave hope for a democratic South Africa. This is evident in the interview excerpt below:

“People of my generation... my matric year was when Mandela was released. So, I grew up properly during apartheid, South Africa...even in my university years, the university I went to was largely a non-white University, a lot of black students, lots of Indian students, etc. But there were, you know, maybe a handful of white students. So, the first time I got to experience white people was in the workplace, and in the residential complex that I stayed in. The reason I mentioned that is because I think where you live, actually provides a platform for engaging with people of different cultures, especially in the context of South Africa. So, for example, for a black person who lives in a township the chance of him living next to someone of a different race is zero, right? But a black person, I mean, my neighbour who's an attorney... grew up in Soweto... I've gotten to learn a lot about him and what he's done and where he comes from and his history etc, because we live in a community of this nature. So, I think people generally...embrace it. Because it is what South Africa is all about. It's diverse. I think that it [the gated community] certainly does offer a positive platform for you to cross those divides and get to know who your neighbours are and what they're about and what their history is, where they come from, problems growing up.”

## 5.2 Neighbourhood trust and community attachment

Previous studies have conceptualised two primary forms of social trust namely: generalised trust and particularised trust (Freitag and Traunmüller, 2009; Uslaner, 2002; Yamagishi and Yamagishi, 1994). The latter refers to trust that supersedes one’s immediate familiarity and the former relates to trust that is Whilst most residents associated their community with high levels of trust, their explanations fell within these two categories, and this was related to the nature of the relations they had with their neighbours i.e. intimates (friends, partners, and family), strangers (whom we know, and with whom we share, very little), and acquaintances (people we know a bit about and with whom we share a little) (Ruonavaara; 2021). Particularised trust was expressed for neighbours who were considered friends or family and the nature of these intimate relationships allowed for the exchange of intimate knowledge and emotional vulnerability.

“Yes I would definitely say I trust my next door neighbours, we have become really good friends and they have been there for us when we went through some really tough personal stuff...we also occasionally leave

the key with them if we are away for long periods of time so they can feed our pets and just check that all is in order...their older daughter even babysits our kids from time to time.”

Behaviours such as leaving the doors of the house unlocked during the day and night, leaving a car parked outside the gate unattended and unlocked with valuables in the car and leaving kids' bicycles in the driveway all indicated a generalised sense of trust in the community. This sense of trust was augmented by the sense of security that the gated communities provided for them. One of the research participants expressed that

“...I might not be the best friends with my neighbour...I would like to think that if anything were to happen that was suspicious on my property that they would at least give me a heads-up you know...I would do the same for them” (Interview with a research participant).

This shows that the trust in the community is also established by exercising reciprocal care. Furthermore, such expectations arose from those residents with whom they have acquainted themselves, however such expectations were not tendered towards neighbours they had very little contact with and considered to be strangers, but to people they know a bit about.

### 5.3 Neighbourhood attachment and identity

In the gated community, place attachment occurs both at the individual (residents) and group levels (neighbours). At the individual level, residents expressed having personal connections to the gated community and these connections are also the reason why they have decided to be part of the Homeowners Association (HOA). Additionally, one of the participants expressed that they once have considered moving to another gated community, however

“the kids are really, really attached to this community, I recall we once thought we would move and we have that informal talk with our kids and they were not pleased at all, but it makes sense because this is home to them, their first home in fact as they have been here since birth and have all their friends here”( Interview with research participant).

This was a common theme regarding attachment to the community, especially among the white residents in both gated communities. At a group level, people feel attached to a place where they have shared meanings through shared historical experiences, values, symbols, and culture. The shared meanings that were present in the conversations with the participants in the study were fourfold:

Firstly, the shared community commitment and devotion to safety and security, this relates to previous discussions on how residents defined their community as being a safe and secure community and the commitment thereof.

Secondly, the emphasis on family values and estate living facilitating family life. For instance, one of the other participants of the study shared the following

“I guess what also binds us is that a lot of the people in the estate are family orientated; there are a lot of families here...even those who are renting, you find, are mostly families and I think that is a value I share with my neighbours.” (Interview with research participant).

Similarly, another participant of the study defined the culture of the community as one rooted in

“family values and people are just really wanting a space to enjoy family life”.

Thirdly, the shared value of protecting property assets and investment by way of preserving and maintaining an aesthetically pleasing environment. Residents expressed that by virtue of people choosing estate living, it also indicates a shared sense of respect for preserving the urban environment within the gated communities as a research participant explained:

“so people who live here generally abide by the rules, not always but most times, right, and I think that sense of respect for the rules and the law is what connects us as people but also makes us want to live in this space...one submits to this order and control and that's a choice you make” (Interview with research participant).

This order and control also leads to an increased attachment to the gated community for residents as it reinforces safety.

#### 5.4 Covid-19 and experiences about community and neighbourliness

The data was collected during the peak of Covid-19 and this specific temporal context allowed for a nuanced insight into social life within gated communities at the time of a global pandemic. One of the participants indicated the impact of Covid on social cohesion in the gated community. She mentioned the following:

“If there was ever a time to actually feel that sense of ubuntu, it is definitely now. I mean this pandemic has really shown us that there we are all human...whether black, white or blue and that in times like these we need to come together and fight this thing [referring to Covid] together...people in our community WhatsApp group are so supportive of one another, I mean one lady was even sending over hot meals to people who tested positive with Covid and couldn't cook for themselves, others delivered medication to one another and people are just generally more helpful...perhaps it is because we have a common battle to fight and it's not just here in Pebble Creek but also just all over South Africa.”

The narrative above extracted from one of the interviews echoes the sentiments of the majority of the participants of the study who expressed the communal love and support that was shared, especially during the initially stages of the lockdown. The above narrative aligns to recent research on Covid-19 and social solidarity that indicate that people generally come together in times of crisis (Lalot, et al.,2021). Furthermore, the fear, trauma and necessity of common coordinated responses during the beginning of the pandemic led to increased perceptions of everyone “being in the same boat” regardless of previous divisions between social groups (Muldoon, 2020).

#### 5.5 Socially exclusive practices and limitations of neighbour relations

There were some participants in the study who indicated that they generally did not interact much with their neighbours. For instance, one research participant indicated that they felt that large luxury estates were not an ideal “sociable environment for young people and best suited for families, and people are focused on being more permanent and long term here so you find a lot more older people living here” (Interview with research participant) based on the fact that there were very few young single people that are her age that she could relate to. She suggests that other gated developments in Greenstone Hill such as the Acacia complex (sectional title schemes) houses more young people to whom she could perhaps relate much better. She does however indicate that developments such as the Acacia complex were “unstable” given the high number of tenants in comparison to luxury estates, hence her decision to choose to live in the current gated community. This also indicates that safety is a big determinant in the decision-making processes of where some gated community residents reside as opposed to their social connections.

Non-involvement was explained through two factors, suburban lifestyle and common apathy. Suburban lifestyle, “bowling alone” (Putnam, 1995), was centred around the working and school days, running nuclear family in the evenings, spending leisure time either at home or outside your own neighbourhood. Most social networks were not spatially defined and not neighbourhood based. Most respondents said their social contacts and friendship links were outside the gated community. The biggest group that had very few social contacts in the gated communities were the black residents. Another one of the participants of the study for example explained that while her children have made friends in the gated community, she did not consider anyone in the community as her friend although she knew her neighbours, but she did not socialise with them (Interview with research participant). Residents' professional lives were outside the community, and children went to school in other areas. Social contacts were born in these environments. Both gated communities also had limited leisure time activities, and there were no places to meet other people (in comparison to the new gated developments that provide lifestyle centres, gyms etc.). For the active age people, social communities were not place based. And for many socialising happened through social media and the internet.

One of the key limitations of social cohesion in the gated community were issues pertaining to race. Interviews revealed that the participants judged other groups mainly on preconceived impersonal experiences and their historical and cultural perceptions of the “other”. In fact, many of the prejudices and stereotypes that emerged mirrored conversations in the broader South African society. For example, one of the residents noted the following:

“...there's a level of comradeship across the community, however...I think that is affected by more of the macro issues in the broader community of South Africa...we need a lot of questioning, and a lot of

comfortableness. I think, you know, that has ripple effect...so I would say there is trust, but I think it's hard to balance with a lot of social influence and mistrust that is going on in the broader society”.

It became clear that race was a conditioning factor for deep connections and that the global and political climate can spill over to micro-communities. In the context of the study, stereotyping and prejudice mainly took place at a group level as opposed to an individual level and was mainly captured in the subtle comments that were embedded in the conversations with the participants. This further amplifies the need for a bottom-up approach when it comes to social cohesion in the country and that such processes are key in addressing the psychological traumas of the country's history to enable greater expressions of democracy and neighbouring at the micro-scale of society.

## 6 RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY

In South Africa, social cohesion is seen as a project of nation-building, whereas globally the concept is more localised. This means that the policy context largely focuses on social cohesion at a national scale (i.e the draft policy on Social Cohesion and Nation Building drafted by the SADAC) with very little attention given to the neighbourhood experiences of social cohesion. This approach over-emphasises the ability for national policy to trickle down into the community and households of South Africans which is a potentially dangerous assumption, given that the remnants of apartheid still remain in the society and efforts to unite communities and to allow for a greater acceptance of diversity still fall short. The neighbourhood is the micro-unit of society. If there are challenges with achieving social cohesion at that micro-scale, that leaves little hope for waves of change at a national level. In fact, the study also revealed that local governments and municipal authorities know very little about the social environment that is provided by gated developments. This laissez-faire approach to the management of social space within the city undermines the neighbourhoods importance in fostering and nurturing social cohesion. While literature suggests that neighbourhood and territorial ties remain largely insignificant in the digital era, the Covid-19 pandemic brought into focus the importance and value of physical social interactions in communities. It is recommended that local government in the approval of these developments, require a drafted social cohesion strategy that will be implemented and followed by the Homeowners Associations of gated developments to ensure that there is an investment into the social life within these spaces which is not only important from a social cohesion perspective, but also valuable for a communities well-being.

## 7 CONCLUSION

This study provided an insight into the community that exists within residential gated community and brought to light the experiences of neighbouring, within this context through the subjective experiences of the residents. While the purpose of this research was not to provide a generalisation of experiences within all gated developments in the country, it highlighted the challenges and opportunities presented by neo-liberal urban settings for social cohesion and its contributions to the country's nation-building project. Furthermore, the experienced mundane realities of these residents in a diverse surrounding, negotiating everyday contacts with racial, cultural, economic groups other than their own, also contributes to the understanding of the post-apartheid community which is important, given the legacy of segregation the country has endured over the years. The willingness and openness of the gated community residents to get along with neighbours from other social groups reinforced the challenges of multiracialism or non-racialism in society in general. Thus, the gated community may be interpreted both as a micro-product and as a reflection of the broader atmosphere in contemporary South Africa. Racial identities and post-apartheid changes are influencing the re-negotiating of identities among individuals in different race groups. At the same time, the thoughts and attitudes of residents can illustrate the more common mentality in South Africa. The complexity between the apartheid legacy, individual and group identities and the post-apartheid experiences develop multifaceted conditions and mechanisms of being involved, negotiating social contacts and socialising in the neighbourhood context.

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