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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Enclaving, cosmopolitanism and class-based exclusion in Rosebank

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Abstract

Rosebank, an upmarket suburb in Johannesburg, attracts residents and visitors with the promise of security, affluence, leisure and global connectivity. Once a racialized enclave during apartheid, Rosebank is today racially diverse and cosmopolitan, yet it remains exclusive. Drawing on the concept of enclaving, we argue that Rosebank is a site of 'cosmopolitan enclaving', an ongoing process through which post-apartheid racial inclusion is reworked into class-based differentiation, and one that produces new forms of urban exclusion in contemporary Africa. Using ethnographic research, we trace how this exclusivity emerges through everyday practices of consumption, security, surveillance and mobility. Focusing on intimacy and detachment, we show how belonging appears among those able to perform cosmopolitan competence, while detachment is sustained through architecture, security infrastructures and asymmetrical mobility. Rosebank makes visible how older spatial hierarchies persist in altered forms, now articulated through lifestyle, capital and mobility rather than race. Cosmopolitan enclaving thus illuminates how exclusion in contemporary African cities is increasingly produced through forms of curated openness that rely on and reproduce inequalities.

Résumé

Banlieue huppée de Johannesburg, Rosebank attire résidents et visiteurs en leur promettant sécurité, prospérité, loisirs et connectivité mondiale. Autrefois enclave racialisée sous l'apartheid, Rosebank est aujourd'hui multiculturelle et cosmopolite, tout en demeurant exclusive. En s'appuyant sur le concept d'enclavement, les auteurs soutiennent que Rosebank est un lieu d'« enclavement cosmopolite », un processus continu par lequel l'inclusion raciale post-apartheid se transforme en différenciation de classe, et qui engendre de nouvelles formes d'exclusion urbaine dans l'Afrique contemporaine. À partir d'une recherche ethnographique, les auteurs analysent comment cette exclusivité émerge à travers les pratiques quotidiennes de consommation, de sécurité, de surveillance et de mobilité. En se concentrant sur l'intimité et le détachement, les auteurs montrent comment le sentiment d'appartenance se manifeste chez ceux qui maîtrisent les compétences cosmopolites, tandis que le détachement est entretenu par l'architecture, les infrastructures de sécurité et une mobilité asymétrique. Rosebank révèle comment les anciennes hiérarchies spatiales persistent sous des formes altérées, désormais articulées par le mode de vie, le capital et la mobilité plutôt que par la race. L'enclavement cosmopolite met ainsi en lumière la manière

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dont l'exclusion dans les villes africaines contemporaines se produit de plus en plus par des formes d'ouverture soigneusement choisies qui s'appuient sur les inégalités et les reproduisent.

Resumo

Rosebank, um bairro de luxo em Joanesburgo, atrai residentes e visitantes com a promessa de segurança, prosperidade, lazer e conectividade global. Outrora um enclave racialmente segregado durante o apartheid, Rosebank é hoje um bairro cosmopolita e com grande diversidade racial, mas continua a ser um local exclusivo. Partindo do conceito de 'enclave', defendemos que Rosebank é um local de 'enclave cosmopolita', um processo contínuo através do qual a inclusão racial pós-apartheid é transformada em diferenciação de classe, gerando novas formas de exclusão urbana na África contemporânea. Recorrendo à investigação etnográfica, analisamos como esta exclusividade se manifesta através das práticas quotidianas de consumo, segurança, vigilância e mobilidade. Centrando-nos na intimidade e no distanciamento, mostramos como o sentimento de pertença surge entre aqueles que são capazes de demonstrar competência cosmopolita, enquanto o distanciamento é sustentado pela arquitetura, pelas infraestruturas de segurança e pela mobilidade assimétrica. Rosebank mostra como as antigas hierarquias espaciais persistem sob formas alteradas, agora articuladas através do estilo de vida, do capital e da mobilidade, em vez de pela raça. A criação de enclaves cosmopolitas ilustra, assim, como a exclusão nas cidades africanas contemporâneas é cada vez mais produzida através de formas de abertura seletiva que dependem das desigualdades e as reproduzem.

Introducing Rosebank

Spanning just 1.42 square kilometres, Rosebank in the north of Johannesburg is one of the city's more desirable suburbs. Defined by Oxford Road and the Gautrain[1] station to the east, Bolton Road to the south, Jan Smuts Avenue to the west and Jellicoe Avenue to the north, the suburb is organized around a cluster of connected shopping malls traversing Biermann Avenue, Oxford Road and Cradock Avenue. On the western edge lies Keyes Avenue, home to a collection of galleries and restaurants and the Trumpet building, an art and design hub. Crossing Jellicoe Avenue to enter the Keyes Art Mile, one is greeted by the vibrant façades of the restaurants and galleries, which contrast sharply with the subdued architectural style of Rosebank Catholic church and St Teresa's School for Girls, both of which were built in the early twentieth century. At the weekend, expensive cars line Keyes Avenue, their presence a marker of economic privilege. Keyes Art Mile reflects the suburb's orientation towards consumption and exclusivity, with places such as the award-winning restaurant Marble, the elite Mesh Club, and several high-end art establishments, among them the Everard Read and Circa galleries. Together, these spaces structure Rosebank as a mixed-use node organized around consumption, leisure and mobility. Rosebank presents itself as open, accessible and cosmopolitan – a secure, pedestrian-friendly environment for business or leisure regardless of race or class. Yet only a few can enjoy what Rosebank has to offer.

[1] The Gautrain is an express commuter train linking parts of Pretoria and Johannesburg to the OR Tambo International Airport in Kempton Park.

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Over the past fifty years, Rosebank has undergone significant transformation, with the pace of change accelerating since the opening in 2011 of the Gautrain station, which connects the suburb to Pretoria (the capital of South Africa), the airport and Johannesburg's city centre. Commercial expansion, residential development and infrastructural upgrades have increased Rosebank's accessibility and visibility. They have also changed its demographic composition. Over forty years ago, in his book *Abe Berry's Johannesburg in Drawings and Text* (1982), Berry[2] depicted Rosebank as white, English-speaking and upper class. He described the suburb as 'the home of the very much undistressed gentlefolk'. He added that it 'apparently has its own standards of behaviour, discreet shopping and trading in genteel undertones' (Berry 1982: 35–6). Calling Rosebank 'an enclave' (*ibid.*: 35), Berry noted that belonging was expressed through consumption: leisurely shopping sprees, international travel, luxury cars and pampered pets. Today, Rosebank is no longer a racially exclusive and elite suburb. Instead, it is racially diverse and self-consciously cosmopolitan and middle-class. Many are drawn to the convenience, safety and lifestyle promised by what Rey *et al.* (2021) describe as a 'cosmopolitan enclave'. Drawing on the globally touted slogan of 'live, work, play', Rosebank is actively marketed by property developers as open, accessible and connected to transnational circuits of culture and capital. However, as we argue in this article, this apparent openness and inclusivity masks enduring forms of exclusion that have shifted from race-based to class-based.

The perception of Rosebank as 'an enclave' is not incidental. Enclaves are, by definition, about separation and segregation. Historically, apartheid – South Africa's legally enforced racial segregation – shaped the country's social dynamics and spatial landscape. Under apartheid, race-based spatial segregation was rigorously enforced, especially in cities, where racial mixing was more likely to occur. Although the system appeared logistically straightforward, the patterns of spatial segregation did not unfold uniformly across the country, creating differences within cities (Southall 2016). These uneven geographies of privilege and marginalization did not disappear with the end of the apartheid period. Instead, they were reworked in the post-apartheid era, often recast through idioms of choice, lifestyle and security.

Post-apartheid Johannesburg exemplifies what Selzer and Heller (2010: 172) describe as a unique 'internal dynamic of social fragmentation' characterized by 'double enclavization'. The north of the city, which was previously a whites-only area, has become 'an enclave of upper-middle-class privilege increasingly disconnected from the rest of the city, [and] it is itself being parcelled into securitised enclaves' (*ibid.*: 172). Rosebank is one such space. However, unlike the ethnically homogeneous enclave described by Berry, Rosebank today is a racially diverse, cosmopolitan place.

Rey *et al.* (2021) describe 'cosmopolitan enclaves' as sharing key characteristics with other types of enclaves, particularly in terms of the circulation of people, goods, services, capital and networks, and bordering. However, what sets cosmopolitan enclaves apart is that they are 'marked by discourses of openness, ideals of universality, and imaginaries of an integrated and inclusive world' (*ibid.*: 333). Such ideals are never fully realized due to the ongoing need to balance them against practices of (spatial) closure and exclusion. In their writing on enclaves, Nielsen *et al.* (2021) change the emphasis from definition to process. They introduce the concept of

[2] Abe Berry was *The Star* newspaper's liberal political cartoonist from the 1950s to the 1980s.

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'enclaving' – a process they describe as 'a generative and transformative cultural orientation' that emerges from the interplay between social life and the built environment (*ibid.*: 882). They emphasize the role of social actors in shaping and co-creating the urban landscape, presenting enclaving as a 'long-standing yet unstable phenomenon of human orientation' (*ibid.*: 889). Its spatial and material forms are variable and adaptable.

In this article, we draw on the concept of 'enclaving' to foreground process. By integrating Rey and colleagues' notion of the cosmopolitan enclave with ethnographic insights into 'day-to-day interactions and boundary work' (Rey *et al.* 2021: 332), we examine how Rosebank's identity is continually produced through practices of consumption, security, surveillance and mobility. We suggest that Rosebank is an enclave that is continually being 'enclaved'.

In the article, we extend to Rosebank Paul Gilroy's (2005) notion of 'new cosmopolitanism', which is grounded in his reading of Constitution Hill, a former prison complex renowned for incarcerating anti-apartheid activists. It is now a museum, cultural precinct and constitutional court, recognized by UNESCO as a World Heritage site. For Gilroy, South Africa's democratic transition does more than remake institutions. It also demonstrates how racism operates as a political force, and its undoing has the potential to enable new forms of planetary solidarity. Cosmopolitanism in this sense is not an abstract moral stance but a political orientation forged in anti-racist struggle. Rosebank appears, at first glance, to embody this possibility. It enables interaction across race, class, age and nationality. It gestures towards a global society premised on liberal values and universal belonging. Yet, we argue, this apparent openness coexists with structured forms of exclusion. Access to space, for example, is mediated by capital, lifestyle, aesthetic competence and security infrastructures.

In Rosebank, belonging is premised on the performance of cosmopolitan sensibilities: global taste, middle-class positioning and the display of neoliberal values. Public spaces such as shopping malls stage proximity across difference, but this proximity is conditional. Money functions as a gatekeeper, revealing the tension between intimacy and detachment. Cosmopolitanism here is not grounded in anti-racist solidarity but in market participation, property and capital. Rosebank fosters intimacy among those who share cosmopolitan lifestyles while simultaneously sustaining detachment from those who cannot participate in these forms of belonging. Exclusion in this context is not merely economic; it is enacted through aesthetic distinction, dress, social codes, and the ability to navigate securitized infrastructures and inhabit transnational circuits of mobility.

In what follows, we examine four interrelated aspects of Rosebank's cosmopolitan enclaving. First we discuss the process of exclusion that has resulted in the formation of the enclave. We begin with a description of Rosebank and its transformation from a demographically homogeneous and racially segregated area into the multicultural and cosmopolitan mixed-use hub that it has become. Second, we discuss the performance of cosmopolitanism and explore its effect of masking exclusionary practices. Third, we examine security, an ever present issue in South Africa, and the ways in which it is central to the enclave's production and reproduction of divisions and hierarchies. Finally, we discuss mobility as a defining feature of Rosebank, showing how the transient character of the place encourages the making of

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connections through similar values and lifestyles yet prevents deeper social integration and place making. We end with a discussion on how the tension between belonging (intimacy) and bordering (detachment) is enacted and experienced by people who inhabit Rosebank. The article advances the concept of enclaving by showing how exclusion is an ongoing social process enacted through everyday practices of consumption, security, mobility and aesthetic distinction. Exclusion in cosmopolitan enclaves is produced not despite intimacy but through it, and it is sustained through detachment.

The article is based on data collected through interviews, informal conversations and observations from 2022 to 2025.[3] Our interlocutors included long-term residents who experienced life in Rosebank before South Africa's democratic transition in 1994 and more recent residents who moved there after the Covid-19 lockdowns. We sought to understand why they chose to live in Rosebank, their experiences of living in Rosebank, and their perspectives on the area's changes over time. Additionally, we interviewed people who work in Rosebank, including employees in shops, restaurants, office buildings and cultural venues. Through these conversations, we explored their daily experiences of commuting in and out of the area, the accessibility of Rosebank, and their observations about the people who frequent its businesses. We also spoke with visitors who engage in leisure activities in Rosebank, capturing their impressions and experiences of the area. Guided by the principle of developing an 'organic relationship to a social setting' (Bourgois 2002: 18), and ensuring that our presence was non-intrusive and that we could build relationships that allowed for observations of everyday life, we sought to capture experiences of living, working and moving through Rosebank. In addition to interviews and conversations, we have drawn on observations made during visits to Rosebank and at events there, such as book launches and exhibition openings. Bringing together these perspectives allows us to examine the often invisible practices through which the boundary work of policing inclusion and exclusion, belonging and alienation, intimacy and detachment are continually negotiated in Rosebank.

Inhabiting Rosebank

The performance of diversity

'So, what I've realized is that the people who live here in Rosebank are between the ages of twenty-five and forty-five. Black. White. Indian. Every race is here,' Seven says, leaning forward to take a sip of his drink. Seven is a thirty-year-old disc jockey from Botswana. We are sitting at the popular Tasha's restaurant, looking across at the stream of people walking past the restaurant on their way either to The Mall of Rosebank or to The Firs, in the other direction.

'Most of them are working.' He continues: 'Either in the entertainment industry, in a restaurant, as a waiter, in the shops. Even painters, like different artists. Even actors.' He pauses to recollect his thoughts. 'Everyone basically comes here – even sports people. Even social media influencers. This space has that attraction that: you need to go to Rosebank!'

[3] Mkhwanazi was the lead researcher on the project and conceived the Rosebank study as part of the broader research programme. Both authors conducted ethnographic fieldwork in Rosebank. Data analysis and interpretation were collaborative. Mkhwanazi led the initial drafting of the manuscript, and both authors contributed to subsequent writing, revisions and the final version of the article.

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What sparked this description was a question I (Mkhwanazi) posed to Seven about the kinds of people who come to Rosebank. He continued, saying that for many people, Rosebank is the centre of business. 'So on any day, you could meet a CEO at a restaurant, but equally you could also meet a scammer,' he explained.

Conversations with people who live, work and visit Rosebank consistently foregrounded diversity as one of the defining features. When asked to describe Rosebank, Seven listed the professions, racial identities and age range of its residents. In his telling, Rosebank is a place of diversity and opportunity, and what distinguishes the area is its gravitational pull. In other words, Rosebank functions as a centre of economic and social circulation, where people from markedly different social spaces coexist within the same commercial and leisure space. Diversity becomes the defining feature, and race, age and occupation are invoked as evidence of openness.

This representation of Rosebank obscures its racialized history. Writing in the 1960s, the architect Franco Frescura noted that Rosebank was 'totally devoid of black people' and that 'although most of the people you met in Rosebank were probably English-speaking and professed to hold *liberal* opinions, few would have had any contacts in the black community' (Frescura 2016). To understand Rosebank's contemporary racial diversity, it is necessary to situate it within the broader transformation of Johannesburg's social geography before and after 1994.

After 1994, the ANC prioritized dismantling laws that had enforced racial inequality and excluded Black South Africans, including those governing residential racial zoning. However, even before the formal end of apartheid, the economic transition from a manufacturing-based to a service-oriented economy played a crucial role in reshaping residential and employment patterns in the city. As the service economy expanded and the demand for white-collar labour grew, Black professionals entered previously whites-only sectors, and a small but growing Black middle class emerged (Selzer and Heller 2010). As Mercer and Lemanski (2020) note, such class formations in African cities are best understood not only through income or occupation, but through the everyday practices, social relations and spatial contexts that shape middle-class lived experience.

This period saw what is commonly referred to as the 'greying'[4] of certain areas – referring to the movement of the Black middle class from the townships into formerly white areas in order to be closer to employment and educational opportunities. Southall describes how 'a trickle, then a rush' of Black residents moved into white spaces (2016: 184).[5] At first, this was into low-cost rental apartments in the inner city and in older low-density white areas, as both businesses and white residents relocated further north. While the language of 'white flight' captured this movement, Southall cautions that this term does not accurately describe the new 'geographies of exclusion' that were coming into being and which showed 'a shift to class-based rather than race-based segregation' (*ibid.*: 186). It is within this transition from race-based to class-based differentiation that Rosebank's contemporary formation must be located.

[4] 'Greying' refers to the mixing of races.

[5] The central urban areas include places such as Hillbrow, Yeoville and Berea. The lower-density white areas include Rosebank.

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Ndalo, a Black artist who worked intermittently in Rosebank between 2008 and 2018, described the suburb as having long functioned as a middle-class cultural space. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, Rosebank offered what he called 'aspirational experiences'. Venues such as Exclusive Books and Cinema Nouveau provided access to films, literature and music, offering experiences that were not readily available in the township. 'If I was tired of Rockey Street,' he recalled, 'I would go to Rosebank to see an art film at Cinema Nouveau. And after seeing a movie, I would go to Exclusive Books. After browsing Exclusive Books, I would then maybe go catch some music somewhere in Rosebank. Or have dinner or lunch.' For him, Rosebank was a gathering place for young Black people, specifically 'professors, academics, writers, newspaper people, musicians ... There was a time when it was almost like a cultural enclave.' While Rosebank has been described as a cultural enclave by our interlocutors, our analysis is not about a place-based understanding of what constitutes an enclave; rather, it is about enclaving as an ongoing process.

The Zone @ Rosebank, adjacent to The Mall of Rosebank, became closely associated with urban, Black, post-apartheid youth culture (the Y generation) at the turn of the twenty-first century. YFM radio station, which catered to the Y generation's musical and cultural sensibilities, relocated there, aligning itself with a generation with aspirations for upward social mobility and one that was experiencing constitutional freedoms for the first time. Poet Lebo Mashile captured the youth sentiment at the time, stating: 'If we were twenty or thirty in the seventies and eighties, we would have been using everything we had to fight Apartheid ... but now we have the freedom and space to do what we want with our talent and the ability to truly manifest our dreams.'[6]

The relocation of the radio station also reflected the broader geographic reconfigurations under way in the city. Soon, other brands created by Black youth followed, including ACA JOE, Sowearto, Stoned Cherrie, Darkie and Sun Goddess. Rosebank became a stage for the performance of post-apartheid Black success, creativity and consumption (Nuttall 2004), giving rise to what Ndalo called the 'Black-geoisie': a Black bourgeoisie whose status was largely defined by their ability to generate wealth through creative industries.

The influx of Black youth into Rosebank and the rise of shops catering to their needs were not well received by property owners and white-owned businesses. An article that appeared in a property blog, EProp, in 2001 reported a concern with the radio station leasing the space because 'it undermines the traditional strength of Rosebank as an exclusive suburb for high-income earners' (EProp 2001). Some signalled their disapproval by relocating to the even more exclusive Hyde Park and Sandton.

Hugh, a white American musician in his seventies, recalled the tensions that accompanied the 'opening up' of Rosebank's consumer base in the late 1990s and early 2000s. He described Rosebank as a very conservative area, saying that several musical venues and clubs catering to jazz lovers never lasted. These establishments were often shut down following complaints from the residents' association about the noise at night. In his view, noise complaints masked much deeper anxieties about the

[6] See <https://chimurengachronic.co.za/periodicals_posts/y-magazine-the-first-5-issues/>, accessed 13 April 2022.

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clientele – mainly Black patrons and members of the LGBTQ+ community. While race played a role in these tensions, Hugh emphasized that class was equally significant in shaping the tensions.

Today – and, more specifically, in the time following the Covid-19 pandemic – Rosebank continues to market itself as a place for leisure, creativity and youthful energy. Travel platforms list The Mall of Rosebank as among the top places to visit in Johannesburg. During the time of our research, it was number eight on TripAdvisor's top attractions in the city[7] and was marketed as 'a vibrant multi-cultural district' that is creative, lively and full of youthful energy, or as a cosmopolitan space of cultural inclusivity and racial diversity 'with people from all walks of life'.[8] The emphasis on 'all walks of life' obscures an important distinction: while people from diverse backgrounds are present, they do not inhabit the space in the same way. For some, presence is predicated on performing labour rather than indulging in consumption-oriented experiences that signal belonging within the enclave.

The attempts to maintain class exclusivity in Rosebank today are both obvious and subtle. The obvious practices centre on affordability and include high property prices and food and beverage prices. The more subtle forms of exclusivity can be found in architecture, in the cordoning off of places and in surveillance. For example, some of the luxury hotels have private walkways linking them directly to the malls. Navigating these spaces – such as the corridor linking 54 on Bath hotel to The Mall of Rosebank – makes their deliberate inaccessibility to those without purchasing power apparent. These walkways, and the designer boutiques to which they facilitate access, operate as microcosms of exclusion and privilege. A similar exclusionary layout can be found at the west end of Tyrwhitt Avenue. This part of Rosebank is known for its nightlife. In this area is the Italian restaurant Opera, which has the same proprietors as the nightlife hotspots Sumo and Montana. Opera is strategically located to cater to patrons seeking to temper their nightlife excesses after having visited Sumo or Montana. This alignment of dining and nightlife underscores the suburb's dual role as a site of hedonistic escapism and conspicuous consumption, available to those with the means to enter these spaces.

The Keyes Art Mile serves as another example of how exclusivity is maintained. It became popular in 2015 through First Thursdays, a social gathering on the first Thursday evening of the month which encouraged people to visit galleries and support local businesses. On First Thursdays, all the establishments along Keyes Avenue made an effort to attract clients – food trucks and restaurants set up on the street to enable people to gather, eat and drink late into the night. According to the evening's founders, they were 'inspired by similar initiatives in other cities around the world' and First Thursday 'is equally about access to the arts as it is about injecting life into our urban spaces after hours'. In its early days, the Keyes Art Mile was enclosed by barricades, guarded by security and limited to card-payment entry. Although the event invoked openness, it was materially regulated through access.

A third example of the subtle form of class-based exclusion or policing was brought to our attention by the comments that both Seven and Hugh made, pointing out that

[7] See <https://www.tripadvisor.com/Attractions-g312578-Activities-Johannesburg_Greater_Johannesburg_Gauteng.html>, accessed 28 February 2025.

[8] See <https://joburg.co.za/rosebank-johannesburg/>, accessed 21 February 2025.

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belonging in Rosebank spaces requires not only purchasing power but also a familiarity with unspoken codes. Nightclubs provide a particularly visible example of this. Seven and Hugh both pointed out that, in Rosebank, aside from charging entrance fees, nightclubs regulate entry based on appearance, with bouncers policing who is allowed in based on attire. While this is not an unusual practice worldwide, it requires knowledge of what to wear and which type of clothing is allowed in such spaces. In general, designer clothing is favoured, and regular patrons know that hoodies are not allowed unless they are from certain high-end designers. Seven commented on this obscurity: 'They are classing you out with the dress code. They are saying, "I want you to dress like this." What if I don't have those types of clothes?' Using these strict dress codes for patrons and also for staff,[9] nightclubs are able to reinforce social and economic divisions and to subtly control access based on socio-economic status and consumption patterns. These forms of exclusion are class-based because they are not just about purchasing power; they are also about cultural knowledge, embodied style and recognizability. Clothing is one of the markers through which cosmopolitan belonging is assessed. As Scheld (2007) shows in her work on youth in Dakar, fashion and bodily presentation often operate as ways of performing cosmopolitan identity in African urban contexts. In our conversation, Seven tried to explain this, saying, 'In Rosebank, there's clubs that you can never go in with sweatpants, with shorts or a cap or any type of a sneaker. But then there's people and clubs that you can go inside with all those type of things.'

Rosebank has evolved from a cultural hub for creatives to a space increasingly defined by exclusivity and upward mobility. While it remains a space for artistic expression and social performance, the policing of class, appearance and consumption continues to shape who can access its opportunities and on what terms. The suburb's appeal, we suggest, is sustained through these everyday practices of regulation, producing ongoing tensions between aspiration, surveillance and inclusion. Given that boundaries are maintained more through lifestyle than through law, Rosebank exemplifies the ways in which cosmopolitanism can become a classed aesthetic.

Securing openness

Security is central to the production of Rosebank as a cosmopolitan enclave. In conversations with residents, visitors and workers, safety was repeatedly cited as one of the suburb's defining features. Rosebank's appeal lies not only in its cultural and commercial offerings, but also in the idea that these can be enjoyed without fear. This idea is actively cultivated through the visible and layered security infrastructures that shape everyday experiences of movement, leisure and belonging.

In conversations about Rosebank, 'safety' is one of the key issues consistently raised; the other is its creative and cosmopolitan feel. People say that they go to or like Rosebank because it is safe, noting that Johannesburg, as a city, is generally considered to be dangerous. On TripAdvisor, security is one of the five most frequently mentioned characteristics of Rosebank.[10]

[9] Female staff are encouraged to wear 'sexy' clothing and flirt heavily with 'big spenders'.

[10] See <https://www.tripadvisor.com/Attraction_Review-g312578-d311495-Reviews-The_Mall_of_Rosebank-Johannesburg_Greater_Johannesburg_Gauteng.html>, accessed 21 February 2025.

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In South Africa, crime has been identified as a key driver in influencing human settlement development (Landman 2012: 241). Security plays a crucial role in shaping Rosebank's identity as a cosmopolitan enclave. It is fundamental to maintaining its reputation as an accessible yet exclusive urban space. By establishing itself as an environment perceived as safe, Rosebank strategically reinforces cosmopolitan ideals of openness and inclusivity, making it an attractive destination for a diverse range of local and international visitors and residents.

Moreover, this emphasis on security enables a lifestyle centred around leisure, luxury and high-end consumption. The presence of safety measures allows people to engage in activities such as dining at upscale restaurants and sitting outside without worrying about crime, shopping for exclusive brands without fear of being robbed, and enjoying premium experiences without concern about fraud. In this way, security becomes more than just a protective measure – it actively contributes to the performance of cosmopolitanism, facilitating a space where wealth, culture and global influences converge.

Mei, a lecturer at a university in China, articulated this sense of reassurance when explaining a decision to raise her young daughter in Rosebank while she herself returned to China for work. Although anxious about being physically separated from her child, Mei expressed confidence in Rosebank's 'contained' environment. Living in Rosebank meant that her daughter's private school was located across the road, her husband's office was nearby and daily necessities were easily accessible. For Mei, Rosebank's safety made possible a transnational family arrangement structured around care and professional obligations. Security is a key infrastructure that underwrites cosmopolitan mobility. Without it, the promise of 'live, work, shop, play' would falter.

The Rosebank Management District (RMD) is a consortium of businesses that provides the security infrastructure that guards Rosebank against the encroachment of the social conditions and economic instability that have given rise to the violent crime that characterizes Johannesburg more widely. Security personnel hired by RMD maintain a visible presence in areas with pedestrian traffic, most notably at the malls' entrances and at the Gautrain station. They wear black trousers and branded reflector vests with the RMD logo emblazoned on the back above the tagline printed in a reassuring blue: 'A better place, your place'. The phrase encapsulates the logic of distinction ('better') and exclusivity for those who can afford it ('your').

The urban layout reinforces this logic. Security personnel, for example, are always present at the top of Tyrwhitt Avenue, which runs through the middle of Rosebank from west to east. This is where many people enter the walkways leading into the area that houses the three malls of Rosebank – The Mall, The Zone @ Rosebank and The Firs. Recent upgrades to the area have converted the top of Tyrwhitt Avenue into a one-way street. While officially framed as traffic management, such urban design interventions function as security technologies that enhance control. These security measures regulate the movement patterns in Rosebank, intensifying the seclusion of people and exclusion more generally, thus transforming Rosebank into a spatial enclave (cf. Landman 2012: 252).

At peak times, the area at the top end of Tyrwhitt Avenue becomes heavily congested as e-hailing taxis pick up and drop off passengers. To maintain order and security, several guards patrol the area on foot, equipped with two-way radios and

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batons tucked into their belts. Working in shifts to ensure 24/7 security, they monitor the scene closely – directing people where to wait, cautioning them to secure their phones against potential theft, and managing traffic when congestion intensifies. Their presence is both regulatory and reassuring.

To enhance the security presence, a South African Police Service (SAPS) mobile trailer is often stationed on the pavement, particularly during the holiday season. Although the official Rosebank police station is only two streets away, this mobile unit reinforces the area's sense of safety. Beyond this, a 24/7 Security Services patrol truck frequently drives by, manned by security personnel in combat uniforms. Unlike the on-foot guards, these officers carry firearms in harnesses strapped to their legs, further emphasizing the area's heightened security measures. Through patrol, surveillance and subtle forms of instruction, security personnel actively shape how the space is used.

Surveillance technology also plays a key role in Rosebank's security infrastructure and reinforces the performance of safety. CCTV cameras, mounted on lamp posts and at the corners of buildings, continuously monitor the streets, adding another layer of vigilance. This extensive security network – comprising foot patrols, mobile patrols, armed security and surveillance – creates a visible and strategic performance of safety. It reassures visitors and residents that the RMD maintains firm control over potential crime threats. The impact of this security presence does not go unnoticed. A search through comments on tourist review sites reveals visitors highlighting Rosebank's safety, reinforcing its reputation as a secure area.

Tracey, an Australian who spends several months of the year in South Africa, rents an apartment in Rosebank when she is in Johannesburg. Due to her frequent stays, she has become familiar with some of the security guards. She recounted fainting in a mall bathroom. She woke up to a female cleaner trying to rouse her. The cleaner had been sent in by a security guard who had noticed that she had been inside for an unusually long time. While this incident highlights a sense of care and familiarity that can develop between regular visitors and security personnel, it also underscores the extent of surveillance in the area. The quick response suggests a high level of attentiveness emblematic of their slogan 'A better place, your place', but it also reflects the structured monitoring and continuous surveillance that define public spaces in Rosebank.

In South Africa, the security industry has grown significantly (Landman 2012). Security gadgets and services are used in all settings where they are possible or feasible. Nightclubs employ high security measures, from bouncers at the door who search people to digital surveillance. Surveillance here is both disciplinary and protective, regulating the behaviour while sustaining the atmosphere of controlled enjoyment that is critical to the enclave. Seven, who has deejayed in Rosebank's nightlife venues, explained that the patrons' movements are continually monitored by hidden security cameras:

> You only realize when something of yours is lost or you're looking for it. And then they'll tell you that 'No, we saw when you moved from here to the toilet. And then you spoke to someone that was wearing this. And then we saw you outside. And then you remember you came and you bought this.' Like there's literally someone like monitoring you. They monitor your movements, what

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> you're doing, what you are buying, who you are talking to … 'cause even when you're, like, drunk, they tell you that you have to leave or drink water.

While newer residents and visitors to Rosebank feel safe, older residents and those who remember Rosebank before the recent property developments perceive it as becoming increasingly unsafe due to the nightlife and increased commercialization. They look back with nostalgia to when Rosebank felt familiar, intimate and predictable. For example, Violet, a sixty-one-year-old white artist and property manager, said she no longer felt that Rosebank was safe. Having lived alone in one of Rosebank's oldest apartment buildings for around thirty years, she now viewed the recent rapid commercial and residential developments and the accompanying influx of people negatively. '[Today] Rosebank is gangland,' she stated:

> [There are] a lot of drugs, a lot of prostitution. And it is now a place to party. It is for youngsters. I don't say all youngsters want to party … But you can see people like to take selfies, go out with their friends. It is all about the nightlife now.

Violet reminisced about the early 1990s, saying that it 'was the time of purple power puffs or old ladies with dyed hair, and we would meander around the street. Today, the streets have become unsafe; you can't walk around any more.' When Violet moved to Rosebank in 1999, she had initially planned to live there for only six months before moving abroad. However, she says she 'fell in love with the quiet streets', the 'interesting characters', and 'fantastic little shops like Pam Zimmerman that you couldn't find anywhere else'. Violet recalled that there was a tangible 'sense of community' and mutual care before 'the area began to change dramatically in the early 2000s'. Working in the property sector, Violet understood the need for development, but she expressed concern about the negative impact it had on the sense of community and the well-being of individual residents.

John, an eighty-seven-year-old white American widower and retired professor who has lived in South Africa since 1973, said that he has spent many afternoons over the past fifty years walking up Seventh Avenue in Parktown North, which eventually becomes Tyrwhitt Avenue. Reflecting on his safety in Rosebank over the past half-century, John explained that, as the area's demographic changed from being 'virtually all lily-white', you needed 'to look around when you walked through the area increasingly over the years'. While careful not to frame his concerns explicitly in racial terms, John's comment suggests unease with new forms of diversity and the emergence of new social norms. He described himself as being 'sort of out of the mix now'. For him, feeling safe was tied to knowing how to read the environment and understanding when and where one belonged.

Concerns about insecurity and crime are an ever present reality in Johannesburg (Bremner 2004; Selzer and Heller 2010), making the ability to navigate safely a matter of understanding unspoken rules. This promotes a sense of belonging in, and intimacy with, a place. Knowing where and when it is safe to go – or not – is essential in Rosebank, as it is anywhere else in South Africa. In a city marked by high levels of inequality and violence, safety is not absolute but situational. It depends on knowledge of time, place and social codes. Seven demonstrated his awareness of these

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rules, stating: 'I believe Rosebank is safe. To be specific, Rosebank is safe at *specific hours.* I would say between 3 a.m. and 5 or 6 a.m., anything can happen to you. But before that, it is safe.' Safety, then, is something to be navigated rather than assumed.

Despite extensive security infrastructure, Rosebank is not immune to crime (Seleka 2022). There are incidents of pickpocketing, robberies, hijackings and even occasional shootings, some of which have resulted in fatalities among both security personnel and civilians. However, such incidents remain relatively rare. Landman reminds us, however, that 'one cannot consider the issue of crime, fortification and urban sustainability in a linear way' (2012: 241). High levels of security do not translate into low crime rates, nor do they produce feelings of safety. They can sometimes lead to feelings of isolation. As Violent and John intimate, these feelings can be heightened when many of the people who inhabit the space are transient. Intensified security can generate reassurance, but it can also heighten awareness of threat and deepen social fragmentation. In this sense, in Rosebank, security can be seen as a central technology through which cosmopolitan enclaving is enacted – security is key to enabling the performance of cosmopolitanism. It produces a sense of intimacy and connection for those who feel protected.

Mobility and transience

Between 2011 and 2021, the population of Rosebank increased by nearly 70 per cent from a population of 1,085 residents.[11] In the past decade, an estimated 7 billion South African rands have been invested in Rosebank.[12] This has contributed to infrastructural upgrades and the building of more office space and residential properties, reinforcing Rosebank's appeal as a space of convenience, prestige and flexibility. Drawing on global architectural styles, buildings such as 'The Bank', a mixed-use complex marketed as 'New York inspired', exemplify this orientation, as does its positioning opposite international franchises such as Starbucks.

Designed to attract a young, mobile, professional class, these architectural developments index a shift in how belonging is imagined. High-density residential towers with curated rooftop gardens offering commodified city views have replaced the low-rise Art Deco apartment blocks and freestanding houses. The proliferation of high-rise buildings also reflects broader urban trends in which vertical housing becomes a key site through which inequality is organized in cities (Smith and Woodcraft 2020). The low-rise heritage-listed Broadlands apartment, with its tropical Art Deco style, stands as a lone reminder of Rosebank's architectural past amid this wave of new, modern apartment buildings that boast free wi-fi, Smeg appliances and no loadshedding (scheduled power outages). Talking about his fifty years of knowing Rosebank, John remembered the early years when 'there were a lot of low-rise apartments [and] a few freestanding houses along Keyes Avenue' and when 'it was understood that no building more than four storeys could be erected'. The new residential developments along Tyrwhitt Avenue reach up to fourteen storeys.

[11] *Ibid.*

[12] See <https://everythingproperty.co.za/joburg-rosebank-the-suburb-on-the-rise/?>, accessed 23 February 2025.

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These architectural changes show a reimagining of Rosebank's residents – young, cosmopolitan, highly mobile and globally connected. They also underscore the developers' priorities regarding density and affluence, overshadowing historical preservation and ecological considerations. The apartments have a generic layout and their furnishings are also generic, favouring internationally recognizable appliance brands. In our conversation, John not only complained about the prices of the new high-rise apartments, but he also described them as 'morbidly small' and not built to accommodate elderly people. He explained that the ceilings were too low, 'making you feel claustrophobic', and complained about the bathroom, saying that 'the seating in the bathroom was inadequate for me. I also knew I couldn't get out of the bathtub, and there wasn't anything to hold onto in the shower.' His reflections underscore how the redevelopment privileges able-bodied, youthful and short-term residents. The capital investment into property produces density but it does not necessarily encourage depth or investments in place and relationships.

The majority of Rosebank residents do not own the apartments they live in, despite having an average monthly household income of R115,000 to R145,000 – significantly higher than Johannesburg's average of R33,000 to R44,000.[13] Many do not see Rosebank as a place for long-term settlement, but rather as a temporary base aligned with professional mobility and short-term opportunity. Tracey has been living in Rosebank for four to six months of the year since 2012. Although the place she was living in was usually rented on Airbnb, the regularity of her visits had enabled her to make a deal with the owner: she could book her stay a year in advance. She even had a small cupboard where she could lock away some of her belongings during her absences. Her arrangement, however, remains fundamentally provisional. Mei and Jun, her husband, similarly viewed Rosebank as a temporary residence rather than a site of permanent belonging, while Seven framed his time in the suburb as a strategic investment in professional networks, setting a finite time for his stay – fifteen months.

Rosebank's growing desirability as a residential, commercial and leisure hub intensifies this temporality, and the suburb functions as a transient centre for expatriates, corporate employees, tourists and people looking for new opportunities. Multinational companies such as AngloGold Ashanti, De Beers, Coca Cola SA, Total Energies and Universal Music Group have their headquarters there. These companies routinely relocate staff to Rosebank for fixed-term assignments. Phindile, employed by Total Energies, spent eighteen months in Rosebank as part of her international placement before returning to a more senior position in her home country. Total Energies arranged an 'aparthotel' for the duration of her stay, spending almost R2 million (approximately £92,500). This fully furnished apartment at The Capital was cleaned daily and included breakfast, blurring the boundaries between a home and a hotel. The temporary nature of her stay, combined with the hotel-like luxuries and the absence of domestic responsibilities, emphasized its distinctness from a place where one settles down and creates a home. Attachments to people and place can remain minimal. As Phindile put it, 'Sometimes, even living here [The Capital], you never see a familiar face over the weekend because people just come and go.' This, she

[13] *Ibid.*

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explained, was one of the reasons she drove over five hours back to her home in Eswatini every weekend.

The transient nature of the inhabitants of Rosebank has implications for their physical, emotional and financial investment in place making. The paradox is that the rise in the number of spaces for people to live in coincides with a decline in the investment in these spaces by those who live there. This also may affect the kinds of interactions they have and the relationships they build. Relationships are often instrumental and short-lived, shaped by professional timelines rather than shared futures. Seven commented on the experience of dating in Rosebank, saying that while you can 'meet every kind of person in Rosebank, it is difficult to find a person to build a long-lasting relationship with because most people are in Rosebank for a short period of time and usually for business ... No one is here to stay.'

The pursuit of profit at the expense of connection and long-term commitment is also reflected in the number of businesses aimed at attracting younger people, whose incomes are more precarious. The proliferation of co-working spaces – WeWork, Workshop 17, Mesh Club – further institutionalizes the orientation towards transience. Equipped with office amenities, wellness rooms and baristas, such co-working spaces accommodate every kind of worker, from the erratic 'hot-desk' freelancer to those seeking longer short-term rentals. Start-ups, small businesses and young career professionals from various industries are drawn to the promise of a business model that responds to the unpredictability of cash flow in a post-Covid world (Rahayu *et al.* 2021; Sánchez-Vergara *et al.* 2023). These infrastructures normalize provisional belonging. One can belong without committing.

More recently, Rosebank has begun to attract digital nomads,[14] further intensifying the dynamics of intimacy and detachment that define this enclave. Workers from the global North are increasingly becoming a notable tourist class in South Africa's major cities. In 2024, the Department of Home Affairs amended the country's Remote Work Visa requirements to attract more digital nomads. In Cape Town, city officials have positioned digital nomadism as key to the recovery of the city's tourism sector in the wake of the pandemic (Makoza 2023). Websites such as Digital Nomads in Africa (Walsh 2023) are among dozens that provide comprehensive travel and living information to, mainly, US citizens looking to begin their extended work vacations on the continent. Rosebank, with its 'live, work, shop, play' slogan, is attracting an increasing number of these nomads. It is familiar yet different, intimate enough to navigate yet detached enough to avoid investment.

This form of mobility, while it may be celebrated as bringing diversity, is asymmetrical and depends on and perpetuates inequalities. Digital nomads and other global professionals benefit from favourable exchange rates and visa flexibility; however, their stays contribute to rising rents and an intensified demand for short-term accommodation. Experiences elsewhere show that digital nomadism offers both opportunities and risks. In places such as Indonesia, it has been associated with tourists who overstay their visas and those who establish businesses and commit tax evasion (Rahayu *et al.* 2021). The long-term implications of this demographic shift for

[14] Digital nomads are worker-tourists who leverage their strong passport status to travel the world and settle temporarily in countries with a cheaper cost of living.

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Rosebank, and for South Africa more broadly, remain uncertain. What is clear is that, while mobility has become central to Rosebank's cosmopolitan identity, it is uneven.

Rosebank's identity as a cosmopolitan enclave depends on constant circulation. However, people have different capacities for movement. Some move between cities, countries and regions, whereas for many the commute is daily from the peripheral townships to service the restaurants, hotels and offices. The suburb's cosmopolitanism is sustained through mobility rather than settlement, producing a form of belonging that is provisional and is both shaped by and contributes to global inequalities.

Rosebank as an enclave

Rosebank offers a productive lens through which to understand the formation of cosmopolitan enclaves. Following the end of apartheid, the suburb shifted from being an explicitly racialized enclave to being a racially diverse and self-consciously cosmopolitan space. Yet this transformation did not dismantle the exclusion that underpinned its reputation as an enclave; rather, it reconfigured that exclusion in new forms. What was once secured through law and racial zoning is now organized through consumption, security infrastructure and differential mobility.

Rosebank has managed to retain its identity as a class-based enclave through the process of cosmopolitan enclaving, remaining largely accessible to a privileged, mobile, affluent population. The suburb performs 'cosmopolitanism' through discourses of diversity, openness and global connectivity, while simultaneously also enforcing exclusion through economic, spatial and social mechanisms. In Rosebank, cosmopolitanism operates as a divisive and hierarchical ideology – one that legitimizes inequality by framing belonging as the preserve of those with the economic means to participate in its consumer-driven, globally inflected lifestyles.

Cosmopolitanism thus becomes the language through which older hierarchies are reconfigured rather than erased. If Gilroy imagined a cosmopolitanism forged in anti-racist solidarity, Rosebank shows how such solidarities are reworked through property, security and capital, displacing solidarity with consumerism. Exploring the process of cosmopolitan enclaving thus enables us to see the ways in which exclusion in African cities is increasingly produced through new configurations of mobility and property.

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