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Enclaving: materializing detachment and attachment across African cities

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Introduction

For decades, African urban spaces have been characterized by rapid expansion, great transformation, vast economic growth, and experimentation with new material and spatial formats, developments famously inspiring *The Economist* to adorn its front page in 2011 with an 'Africa Rising' cover. Yet, we know that such developments have been very uneven – not just between cities and countries but also *within* urban orders.

This special issue maps and engages these highly unequal urban developments by probing the highly contrasting contexts of Accra, Maputo and Johannesburg – all cities that are undergoing spatial expansion and transformation on multiple levels. Articles in this special issue map and analyse such transformation and expansion in particular by looking at how socio-cultural and political understandings of 'attachment' and 'detachment' are central to analysing African urban spaces characterized, we argue, by increasing separation. Similar to emotions, as discussed by Ahmed (2014), which work to align individuals with collectives, 'attachment' forges social and bodily spaces but with clear effects and within rapidly changing material circumstances. Detachment – the removal of reality from 'any manoeuvre that would associate with specific empirical evidence, chains of association or overarching infrastructure' (Simone 2018: 26) – is underlined in our articles to appreciate the importance of infrastructural arrangements. A point of departure for all our articles is to show how what we term 'enclaving' is central to shaping and changing interpersonal interactions, including attachment and detachment.

In the African context, 'enclaving' is a term that has commonly been used to describe both large-scale political and economic arrangements (Buur and Sumich 2019; Laterza 2016). It has been used, for instance, in relation to spaces designated for the mining of minerals (Ferguson 2005; Kirshner and Power 2015), oil and gas-related production and living spaces (Appel 2012; 2019), as zones for foreign direct investment and designated special economic zones (Addo 2025; Fei and Liao 2019), or as a migrant-centred 'enclave entrepôt' (Zack and Landau 2022).

Approached as transcending merely a cordoning off or sequestering of particular spaces, a common point of departure has often been taken from the definition

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provided by Hannah Appel in her work from Equatorial Guinea, where she related enclaving to resource extraction – namely, that enclaving can be seen as 'the unequal distribution of urban infrastructure' (Appel 2012: 441; see also Lesutis 2019). Crucially, Appel showed what one could term the ripple effects of forms of enclaving in African contexts involving the reconfiguration of relations between foreign investment and the state and transformations of citizens' expectations vis-à-vis the state, in addition to radically shifting material, social and symbolic urban landscapes. The last few decades of research on enclaving in Africa have prioritized a range of particular forms of African enclaved urbanity, including gated communities, privatized urbanism, privately master-planned cities, and cities emerging from complex socio-political or religious dynamics (see Ablo 2023; Ashoub and Elkhateeb 2021; Fält 2019; van Noorloos and Klosterboer 2018; Schuermans 2016; Titilayo 2023; Ukah 2016; 2018).

Many of these contributions to understanding contemporary African urban dynamics seek to transcend the view of enclaving as merely a materialization of capitalism-driven urban development. They focus on connections, reverberations and complex imbrications – an argument of complexification sometimes not made in the more generic and sweeping critiques of urban capitalist development (e.g. Davis 2006). One of the most promising approaches in this regard was recently proposed by Fontein and Smith (2023). In their introduction to a special issue of *Africa* that deals with a broad range of urban–material configurations, they call for a revalorization or renewed emphasis on materiality – what they term 'urban stuff' – in approaching the African urban. Crucially, they argue that particular genres and readings of the African city in recent decades have perhaps overemphasized the hidden, invisible and spiritual elements – perhaps eclipsing the material. Fontein and Smith argue that:

> Significantly, we do not discard the existing tropes of the invisible, informal and ephemeral aspects of African cities; rather, we seek to ground these in the particular materialities of infrastructure and planning, objects and bodies, technologies and substances through which they manifest themselves. (Fontein and Smith 2023: 2)

Our approach shares Fontein and Smith's concern with how the 'stuff' and spectrality of the African urban are 'emergent from each other, how they gain traction and are real-ized in everyday contexts' (2023: 2). In their discussion on the trajectory from depictions of African cities as crisis-ridden and falling apart (structure) to a subsequent literature emphasizing sociality, relationality and the invisible (agency), Fontein and Smith (*ibid.*: 5) underline an alternative in highlighting that 'the haptic, tactile city, in all its fragmentation, is itself generative of powerful and social and political dynamics'. While an important observation, the position we emphasize is taking a single form, the enclave, and analysing this as *moving* between various domains and registers. That is, enclaving oscillates between the built material forms, thus exerting material agency in the form of the walled or gated compound. However, as seen in a host of studies beyond the continent (see, for example, Brosius 2010 on the shape of middle-class desires in India), it also extends into the domain of the household, shaping ideas and desires of familiarity, sociality or relationality within public, private and contested urban spaces more broadly, and is available for analysis in this way as a phenomenon on planes of the imaginary, discursive and social. In this

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way, we also further discussions about recent conceptualizations of enclaving in the African context as a mobile aesthetic imaginary that, in part, transcends the built environment and shape (Nielsen *et al.* 2021).

So, what do we mean by 'enclaving'?

In this special issue, we approach *enclaving* not simply as the spatial boundedness of gated or cordoned-off sites but as a mobile and relational process through which forms of separation, connection and aspiration are materialized and imagined. Following Nielsen *et al.* (2021), we understand enclaving as an aesthetic and imaginative practice that travels across urban orders, operating through material forms, sensory registers and anticipatory desires rather than being reducible to fixed territorial enclosures alone. Simultaneously, we draw on Waldman and Ghertner's (2023) formulation of enclaving as a spatial politics of detachment, in which re-urbanization projects actively reorganize relations between bodies, infrastructures and urban space, producing particular forms of subjectivity and personhood. Situating African cases within a longer and comparative debate, we also recognize, following Caldeira's seminal work on fortified enclaves in Latin America (1999; 2000), that enclaving has long been central to the reconfiguration of urban segregation, citizenship and security beyond Africa. Taken together, these perspectives allow us to conceptualize enclaving as a dynamic process that simultaneously reorganizes material space, social relations and modes of attachment and detachment within contemporary cities. Therefore, we pose three main questions:

1. What are the ways in which the material form of enclaving in African cities relates to detachment and attachment?
2. Does enclaving in its material and immaterial registers imbue novel ways of inhabiting African urban orders?
3. How does reconfiguring attachment and detachment within a context of built enclaves affect – or is affected by – political discourses of citizenship, belonging and territorial claims?

In posing these three questions, this special issue focuses on material and experiences from Accra, Maputo and Johannesburg as examples of what Simone (2019) calls the 'Southern districts' of the globe. As he notes, through intense experimentation in modes of inhabitation and improvisation in these districts, urbanites inscribe and cut loose spaces, forms of demarcation and domains, effectively producing, we argue, forms of enclaves premised upon registers of attachment and detachment.

Drawing on material from all three urban contexts, we are aware of the pitfalls involved in potentially comparing highly distinct cities – a problem of comparison that Robinson (2011) has also noted more generally. As reflected in the articles of this special issue, the singularity of the three cities is retained in distinct ways through the authors' particular empirical approaches, reflecting the spatio-temporal specificities defining these sites. This singularity could be labelled as the resonance of earlier ideals of modernity and development, such as those promoted by the socialist nation-building project in Mozambique for Maputo (Pitcher and Askew 2006; Nielsen 2014; Sumich 2018), the legacy of the apartheid-era racialized spatial segregation of the urban in South Africa for Johannesburg (Nuttall and Mbembe 2008) or the long-term colonial, postcolonial and transnational trajectories impacting Ghana and Accra

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(Quayson 2014). While acutely aware of such starkly different urban historical trajectories, we have conducted an exploration and tentative comparison starting from the point of departure of enclaving, which, as a phenomenon, is present in all the cases covered by the articles in this special issue. In all three cities, large-scale land acquisitions – almost always involving conflicts over ownership and use rights – are prominent examples of sub-Saharan Africa's explosive expansion of heterogeneous urban space, which, in turn, is commonly reliant on enclaving (see also Pitcher 2017). We are also inspired by what Elísio Macamo noted in his 2017 Lugard lecture about urban Africa and the ways of living and engaging its registers and fellow humans:

> African urban settings erase the distinction between the observer and the observed, and heightened sensitivity does not translate into less feeling towards others. Rather, taking the other into account becomes the condition of the possibility of life in African urban settings. (Macamo 2018: 7)

Drawing on various concrete empirical materials from these three highly different African cities, this special issue seeks to make sense of and substantiate Simone's notion of inhabitation and improvisation within multiform enclaves across urban orders. By doing so, we aim to highlight a particularly important African site for experimentation – namely, the nexus of urbanity, attachment and detachment.

This introduction proceeds in two conceptual steps. First, we clarify what we mean by enclaving by foregrounding the debate on detachment, attachment and enclaved materialities, drawing on work from Africa as well as on longstanding discussions in Latin America and North America. We then situate these conceptual tools within broader debates on African urban transformation, where enclaving emerges not as an exception but as a constitutive feature of contemporary African urbanities.

Detachment and attachment: towards enclaved materialities

This section lays out the core conceptual terrain through which the contributions to this special issue approached enclaving, detachment and attachment. Rather than treating enclaves as a self-evident or exclusively African phenomenon, we situate current debates on African enclaving within a longer and comparative genealogy of urban scholarship that has addressed fortified spaces, segregation and security across diverse urban contexts. Seminal work from Latin America and North America – most notably Caldeira's analyses of fortified enclaves (1999; 2000) alongside studies of fortress urbanism and securitized citizenship by Low (1997; 2004) and Mitchell (2005) – provides an important point of reference for understanding how material forms of enclosure reorganize urban space, social relations and subjectivities. These bodies of work do not serve as templates to be replicated in African contexts, but as heuristic entry points for thinking comparatively about enclaving as a spatial, political and affective process. From this perspective, gated communities and fortified developments are not treated as the empirical limit of enclaving but as a historical, visible expression of broader processes of detachment and attachment that unfold across multiple material and imaginative registers in contemporary African cities.

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As urban geographers Waldman and Ghertner summed up:

> Across much of sub-Saharan Africa, too, the enclave reflects a broader spatial aesthetics of detachment … whereby existing urban centers are 'reurbanized' … in response to the demands of African capital repatriation and the elite desire to be of, while maintaining socio-cultural distinction from, the existing African city. (Waldman and Ghertner 2023: 286)

In addition, the imposition of spatial, material and, crucially, non-material forms of separation and detachment have been integral to how the middle classes (both aspiring and accomplished) have attempted to generate 'some form of order, control and uniformity [to engage the] potentially dangerous chaos of the city' (Nielsen *et al.* 2021: 894).

Further, Waldman and Ghertner go on to map what they see as a particular form of human subject being formed around processes of enclaving. The imagery of the enclave also forms an enclaved subject:

> A certain 'enclaved subject' nonetheless haunts this work, showing up in discussions of how differently positioned individuals submit to technologies of security, how whiteness becomes valorized in enclaved spaces, how the enclaved body becomes globally marketable, and how the beautified natures within enclaves reflect the beautiful people behind the gates. (Waldman and Ghertner 2023: 281; see also Graham 2010)

Mirroring other studies of urban areas that underscore a fragmented form of personhood inhabiting these cities, Waldman and Ghertner (2023) underline the emergence of what they term 'secessionary selves' and 'forms of privatised personhood' as characterizing these cities. Crucially, the argument also intersects with and builds on how verticality, the visual and security–political orientations reshape the urban landscape – for instance, in Nairobi, through the work of Goodman (2020) and Smith (2015; 2017). More generally, their arguments also reflect earlier work that has proposed the notion of the 'SUV mode of citizenship' (Mitchell 2005) as characterizing large-scale urban orders and their dynamics of zoning, sequestration, hierarchization and individuation.

The conceptual imagery proposed by Waldman and Ghertner, Mitchell, Goodman and Smith resonates strongly with the kind of fortress-like urbanism that is found not only in contexts in the global North (see Low 1997; 2004) but also in often racialized and gendered enclaves in the global South – for instance, in Latin America (see, for example, Alves 2018; Caldeira 1999; 2000) and in Asia and Africa (Datta and Shaban 2016; Kuldova and Varghese 2017). A case in point here is all the connected yet fragmented racialized zones of detachment in South Africa (see, for example, Schuermans 2016; Herbert and Murray 2015). As Waldman and Ghertner (2023: 285) argue, enclaving also comprises a form of neocolonial pastiche revolving around whiteness: '[t]o live in the zone where Euro-American expats live, or to share the spatial freedoms they are understood to enjoy, becomes the dream that luxury townships pitch to buyers'. Thus, in contexts where the legacies of colonial planning continue to mark stark class and ethnic hierarchies, colonial nostalgia and the

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elevation of a Victorian pastiche – a kind of architectural heteroglossia that mixes modern materials with colonial textures and insignia – are common sales strategies. In an earlier work commenting on 'an English-cricket themed enclave' near Delhi, Waldman *et al.* reproduce the selling points used for this enclave: it is 'set [in] an idyllic environment to suit everyone … prime locations overlook the cricket ground. In the time-honoured style of the classic English village … imagine dining in the tavern … "by invitation only"' (Waldman *et al.* 2017: 184–5). As Mercer (2024: 8) has pointed out in an incisive work on suburbia in Africa: 'In former British colonies such as Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe, for example, suburbs were planned as exclusive residential enclaves for Europeans, and continue to be seen as relatively exclusive, well-serviced residential zones.' Similar arguments about racialized colonial pastiches – including how the 'invitation' relates to racialized subjects – can also be made on the African continent and in its many ready-made enclaved urban developments, replete with colonial, neocolonial and/or apartheid-nostalgic features – as Hook and Vrdoljak (2002), Murray (2015) and others have shown for South Africa (see also Maraire, this issue). Furthermore, as Waldman and Ghertner (2023: 284) stress: 'The gated high-rise thus must be understood as part of enclaving of gendered agency that portrays safety as a lifestyle choice and the consumption of privatised spaces as the idealised expression of sexual and gender freedom.'

A similar argument about the attraction of the enclave, but crucially as a point from which to ambivalently attempt to re-engage your peers and relatives, is made by Lockwood in an analysis of Nairobi (Lockwood 2023). He points out that the enclave is attractive for forms of protection and, 'when asked for help, [inhabitants of enclaved compounds] draw back, anxious to protect their newfound wealth. The urban enclave's impersonal space was attractive for precisely this reason' (*ibid.*: 492). Thus, there are some instances where African urban material does *not* conform to a secessionary form of selfhood, as pointed out by Lockwood – namely, the particular forms of attachment and detachment assumed in our case studies from Accra, Maputo and Johannesburg. Rather, attachment and detachment muddy the waters, undercutting the possibility of the emergence of a secessionary selfhood in a pure form. Rather, we argue that the notions of detachment and attachment in our material reflect various registers for generating, negating or negotiating forms of enclaving and are therefore integral to multiform expressions of aspiration. This is also in line with some other recent research on enclaving from the African continent, such as Green's (2023) work on Zimbabwe, in which she maps and analyses how Baptist Zimbabweans not only manoeuvre in urban space – alternating, for instance, between different spatial routes through the city for (self-perceived) protection. Crucially, Green shows that, while informed by Christian cosmology, such 'mobile enclave-making' transforms relations between selves and others, meaning that 'middle-class residents of Zimbabwe's capital city, Harare, are trained into rhythms of self- and property-protection' (*ibid.*: 31). What Green describes for Harare may be replicated for middle-class residents' organization of life in African urban settings across the continent, and find resonance in distinct urban practices – practices that clearly relate to the dynamics of attachment and detachment.

Furthermore, we would like to add that the work undertaken by, for instance, Green and Manuel (see also Sumich and Manuel, this issue) underlines the global city

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character of urban African configurations – a form promoting flexible and fluid identities that are also open to forms of attachment. Importantly, as also highlighted by Hunt *et al.* (2024) in a work on madness, violence and the urban based on material from Congo, attachment is seen as crucial to grapple with forms of destruction, death and relationality – not merely as related to (erstwhile domains of) love (see also Stoler 2006). This latter analysis stresses that attachment is not only a relevant aspect of everyday lives and aspirations but is also present in contexts that are often merely seen as harsh or characterized by multiple forms of violence. It must be reckoned with analytically if we are to make sense of such realities, whether enclaved or otherwise.

In addition, the focus on the enclaved subject and its multiple material forms also resonates with more long-term and multidimensional work on the broad horizon of pro-social African practices used to create and generate kin and thus circumvent (material or immaterial) forms of enclaving that would threaten to sever or weaken ties. In fact, such pro-social or pro-human practices in African scholarship have been related to experimentation, and fundamental openness is characteristic of the continent. Francis Nyamnjoh has been vocal in this sense and has, in numerous ways, emphasized how Africans – through a form of incompleteness – may be seen as 'frontier beings' (Nyamnjoh 2017). Such 'frontierness' and experimentation resonate well with the new urban forms emerging in Africa – forms that are often captured by the conceptual apparatuses and spaces of experimentation provided by Afropolitanism (Mbembe 2020 [2010]), Africanity (see, for example, Diagne and Amselle 2020 [2018]), Afrofuturism (see, for example, Goldstone and Obarrio 2017) and other experimental forms of being, becoming and conviviality (see, for example, Ofosu-Kusi and Matsuda 2020), which perceive the world relationally and help characterize the continent, including its urban domains (see also Mkhwanazi and Manderson 2020).

We would also like to point out that a task such as the one we have given ourselves – to map and understand the material and immaterial forms that detachment, intimacy and aspiration may assume within the context of enclaving – should also include, or at least acknowledge, the importance of the arts. Literary fiction, audiovisual material (such as films) and other art forms, including those that are categorized as belonging to the performative domain, are all key to assessing how these dynamics unfold and, indeed, become materialized – as shown in the brilliant ethnographic film *Maputo: ethnography of a divided city* (Tvedten *et al.* 2018) or as portrayed in works of fiction that capture – as well as generate – visions of the city. An example of the latter would be the anthology *Accra Noir* (Danquah 2021), a cornucopia of short stories from specific sites within Accra that together comprise an array of uniquely situated understandings of not only the city and its spaces but also the variety of ways in which its widely different urbanites navigate the different and dangerous ideals of detachment and intimacy that permeate their relations to others, both significant and insignificant.

Enclaving and the new African urbanities

Historically, research on African cities has often focused on studying the city itself, whereas ethnographic and sociological studies have focused holistically on small-scale societies and contexts (Southall 1985). For example, some anthropological

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studies of Africa after World War Two focused on certain groups in specific urban contexts (Mayer 1961; Mitchell 1956; 1969) and associational life in African cities (Wilson and Mafeje 1963; Little 1965). In some scholarship at the end of the last century, African urban contexts were cast as laboratories for radical social and political change within a colonial or postcolonial context (Wallerstein 1966; Gugler and Flanagan 1978). In recent decades, however – and often heavily informed by discourses of modernization and development – the approach to research on African urban formations was one characterized by lack, maldevelopment/failure, danger or an absence of planning – in this, it reflected research in other areas on the continent. This was perhaps most infamously summed up by Rem Koolhaas's reading, in both film and text, of Lagos as a form of pathological urbanity (Koolhaas 2002; for a critique, see Gandy 2005; 2006).

Such a Euro-American and often neocolonial vision of African urban chaos and lack has been pointed out as problematically predominant, perhaps most explicitly by Nuttall and Mbembe (2008) in their exceptionally thorough book on Johannesburg. There, they write that the African urban, in some form, is commonly conceptualized as 'an emblem of irresolvable crisis' (*ibid.*: 5). Indeed, in recent studies of African cities, the hegemonic tropes and discourses of failure are prominent. For instance, in Stephanie Newell's keen analysis of urban life in Lagos, a critique of the mediated notions of dirt and refuse assumes centre stage in analysing the social and political metabolism of that particular urban order (Newell 2020).

Furthermore, as Tomás (2022) points out in a refreshing new take on Luandan urban formations and urban thought in general, too much research on African cities has drawn its points of view from either the so-called Chicago School or the so-called Los Angeles School of urban studies. Instead, Tomás underlines the importance of avoiding template global North explanatory apparatuses when approaching African cities and of questioning the arguments of the 'hard exceptionality' of African cities, which, he argues, smuggles a form of functionalism into their analyses:

> Southern urbanism, a brainchild of development studies, proceeds from the same predicament [of methodological othering]. Cities in the South are too busting and too precarious, it is argued, and life there is always too contingent to be understood in these conventional ways. Part of the problem is the functionalism that is ingrained in these approaches, which expects cities to behave in particular ways so that they can be explicable in certain ways. (Tomás 2022: 206)

Reflecting both Tomás's argument for a non-functionalist approach to cities and Macamo's insistence on how intimacy and detachment are imbricated, and also taking into account the excellent and original work on African urbanity coming out of the African Centre for Cities in Cape Town (see, for example, Bekker *et al.* 2021; Parnell and Pieterse 2014; Pieterse and Simone 2013; Simone and Pieterse 2017), the contributions in this special issue move – albeit in different ways – in directions that provide a view of urban formations and dimensions on the continent that not only allows for nuance but also locates dimensions other than the one characterized by failure and doom. By mapping the processes of detachment and attachment, we contribute to research that sees African urbanity not only from the perspectives of

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the margins, as we believe that the complex dynamics surrounding enclaving allow us to capture key dimensions of contemporary African urbanity. By mediating insides and outsides of imagined, desired, planned or already materially built forms that cordon off certain urban resources, enclaving presents particular challenges to collectivity, individuality and intimacy (see also Nielsen 2023). Below, we note a few important trends relevant to enclaving and its dynamics of detachment and attachment.

First, as African urbanity spreads across the continent – for instance, through what is commonly termed 'urban sprawl' (see, for example, Yiran *et al.* 2020) – the lifeworlds of Africans are changing in both rural and urban settings. This also means that the *scale* of the urban area in Africa is undergoing transformation, and what we used to think of as *rural* is becoming urbanized in some ways. A new strand of literature is paying increasing attention to such emerging zones of indistinction between rural and urban areas, including the key work of Archambault. In a number of works, she has demonstrated the importance of an attentiveness to such peri- or para-urban zones in her analyses from Mozambique, also demonstrating the transformations of the social, including detachment and attachment, that this change entails (see, for example, Archambault 2017; 2018; 2021).

Second, beyond the spatial expansion of the urban and its seeping into domains hitherto thought of as rural (Ablo and Bertelsen 2022), there are also qualitative changes to the composition of the urban – not least through large-scale and small-scale experimentation. At a basic level, this concerns the many forms of enclaving unfolding beyond fortressed cities, such as the novel mini enclaves in Maputo's high-density *bairros*, and transforming the social topography and formats of the relationality of the enclaves (see Bertelsen 2021). Such street-level experimentation shows, we believe, that an imaginary or logic of enclaving is also transforming the fabric of the African urban beyond the hyper-visual, glitzy, fortressed gated communities and private cities being constructed (as well as conjured through speculative plans) across the continent. Taking their cue from Italo Calvino's novel *Invisible Cities*, in their book *Kinshasa: tales of the invisible city*, De Boeck and Plissart (2014 [2004]) highlight how an urban formation is replete with the 'local production of zones of desire, expectation and hope'. As De Boeck has shown more generally, such desires also materialize in plans that border the phantasmagoric, such as the 'Cité du Fleuve' plans rolled out in Kinshasa (De Boeck 2011). More recently, in a related yet distinctly different vein, Smith has also re-centred the 'underneaths' of high-rise buildings in Nairobi, as well as speculation about their collapse being grounded in their fakeness (Smith 2023). Smith's incisive analysis of fake buildings indexes the intimate relations between the material and the speculative, the infrastructure and the opaque economies at work – dynamics central to some of our analyses of enclaving in this special issue (Ablo and Overå, Yekple and Gastrow in this issue).

Third, the large-scale experimentation of private new developments is also integral to a shift in the role of sovereignty or statecraft. As Moser *et al.* (2022) show, there are around seventy entirely new cities currently being built on the continent – many of these with financial support from what they term 'uncharted foreign actors', but, crucially, often with ties to both foreign states and African elites. This development resonates with Easterling's (2005; 2014) assertion that, for urban transformation more generally, the built environment is a materialization of power in

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its most concrete sense. Easterling points out that infrastructure provides the rules of the game for the unfolding of social, political and other forms of relationality – including attachment and detachment. Thus, state power is built not only into the dynamics of zoning and (more or less opaque) urban planning process but also into the roads, gravel, cables, signalling towers and cement, increasingly transforming the planet into an urbanized one (see also Archambault 2024). Such attentiveness to the imbrications of political citizenship, sovereignty and forms of urban enclaving has also been made apparent on the African continent (Bekker and Therborn 2012) – and not least demonstrated in the groundbreaking work of Appel in her incisive analysis of the oil industry in Equatorial Guinea (Appel 2012; 2019), as well as in a recent analysis of smart city experiments on the continent (Odendaal 2023). Furthermore, Claudia Gastrow has documented how urban spatial forms of inclusion and exclusion are integral to the rehashing of (urban) citizenship in Luanda. Crucially, she underlines how such transformations and urban developments are fundamentally fuelled by particular postcolonial politics (and, in this case, presidential power) – again underscoring particular African dynamics of enclaving, which are irreducible to explanations solely emphasizing the impact of generic neoliberal urban development (Gastrow 2017; 2020; 2024; see also Schubert 2017: 47 on 'New Luanda' for a similar argument).

Thus, it is crucial that in an analysis of enclaving, attachment and detachment – the forms of statecraft involved – are identified, as well as the way in which the transformation of major cities into pastiches of various forms of enclaves also involves a transformation of the postcolonial state itself – not least due to the involvement of many postcolonial elites in the development of such enclaves (see, for example, Sumich and Manuel, this issue) or in the transformation of the urban fabric into securitized zones or enclaves, the latter replete with processes of inclusion and exclusion (see, for example, Glück 2017).

In our special issue, we reflect in various ways on all these large-scale transformations of the African urban and how they impact forms (imagined or materialized) of enclaving. This means, first, that we take seriously, as researchers, the *aspiration* displayed in spaces sometimes cast as marginalized (see, for instance, Bertelsen and Nassone, this issue). Second, we recognize that the African urban spaces we map and analyse conform to a type of global city that promotes flexible or fluid identities. These cities may benefit from being read materially and discursively – as in Ato Quayson's analysis of a single street in Accra, where play with language, fleeting forms of relationality, and intense reading of signs, together with 'Others', form central parts of an understanding of the city (Quayson 2014). In this way, Quayson's work has several clear similarities with Simone's tone-setting work, where the city also has a clear post-material feel: rather than reading, for example, African cities as lacking infrastructure, Simone emphasizes how the people make up the infrastructure that makes these cities work (Simone 2004; 2019; see also De Boeck and Plissart 2014 [2004]).

To some extent, similar readings have been made for Maputo, Accra and Johannesburg, which we will draw on and develop further here. For Maputo, for instance, in his delineation of the close and intimate relations between housing and colonial and postcolonial politics, Morton (2019) has shown how aspiration – for citizenship and humanity, well-being and wealth – takes concrete shape, both visibly

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and clandestinely in various enclaved sections of the city. Jason Sumich extends this argument, showing how contemporary enclave urbanism in Maputo may not be read as simple reflections of real estate speculation or neoliberal urban capitalism, but rather as contemporary materializations or resuscitations of utopian aspirations that continue to linger, premised on time:

> The underlying utopianism of enclaving is often expressed through the idiom of time, either as efforts to speed it up through modernising projects to transform the nation and by extension its inhabitants, or to escape the ravages of time by erecting defensive enclosures or various combinations of both. (Sumich 2023: 140)

Drawing on the metropolis of Johannesburg – a city that has vast connections with Maputo, both historically and contemporarily (Heer 2019; First 1983) – Nuttall and Mbembe (2008) stress both the machinations of race and capital fundamental to the emergence of the city and the cracks (if not the fundamental openness) of its urban order. Such cracks and possibilities for experimentation are also emphasized by Wilhelm-Solomon in his work on dilapidated buildings that are occupied in downtown Johannesburg. While recognizing that such places are structured by forms of exclusion, extermination and structural violence, Wilhelm-Solomon, instead of underlining fragmentation and individuation, holds that these are generative of the social in a sense that he calls the 'the ruinous vitalism of the urban form' (Wilhelm-Solomon 2017: 374; see also Masango and Mkhwanazi and Bertelsen and Nassone, this issue). In their work on Accra, both Grant (2009) and Quayson (2014) show how, broadly, sociality, generativity and connectivity – dynamics inherent to processes of detachment and attachment – are fundamental to understanding the city, both as a historically open-ended and cosmopolitan site of relations spanning space, time and the Atlantic Ocean through migratory patterns (Grant 2009) and as a place where relationality and humanity unfold and are engaged at the street level, a street that is also an urban palimpsest on several levels (Quayson 2014).

In sum, by underlining some of the work undertaken in the three African cities we focus on here, we want to showcase not merely that Africa has been – and still is – a global site for profound urban experimentation and a laboratory for the future in general terms (see also Goldstone and Obarrio 2017). This is, after all, a point already made in a range of important research over the last two decades, including by Simone (2004), Pieterse (2008; Pieterse and Simone 2013), Nuttall and Mbembe (2008), Grant (2009) and Myers (2011). While building on these insights, we instead stress that such diverse and, arguably, currently intensified forms of urban experimentation centring around multiple forms of enclaving provide rich sites in which to rethink the conditions for and dynamics surrounding detachment and intimacy within the African urban context as a whole. How can one approach these new African urban formations, and how do they relate to, implicate or reflect particular forms of aspiration or desire?

Enclaving beyond the gate and the wall: the contributions

As the above sections have highlighted, one might do worse than observe global urban dynamics from Africa. For here, cutting-edge, large- and small-scale

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urbanization in the form of enclaving meets a vast array of experimentation in how these material urban forms are to be inhabited, understood, moved between, contested and negotiated. In this special issue, we focus on these latter dynamics precisely in order to provide a corrective to those approaches that do not see beyond the gate and the wall of the enclave and proceed to make assumptions about enclaves on that basis. Instead, we argue, as an increasingly common African urban form (material and immaterial), the enclave is key to understanding how forms of detachment and attachment are reshaped and fuel contemporary African urban forms of being and becoming, of relating and distancing. Our contributions do this in distinct ways.

Ablo and Overå analyse the motivations for housing investment and residents' material and social experiences in a new urban development, the Appolonia City of Light. They argue that the aspiration to live in an enclaved private city is driven by complex relationships, processes and imagined futures. Living in a privatized city is an aspiration for comfortable living and upward mobility – a detachment from the highly congested, noisy and infrastructurally and administratively cumbersome housing situation in Accra. However, the imaged space is different from the lived place, as the article shows that residents' expectations of service delivery and security are unmet as the private city cannot 'control' the infrastructural and institutional context of Accra.

Bertelsen and Nassone identify urban practices oriented around care, empathy and mutuality as key forms of negotiating intimacy and detachment. Here, they explore such practices in Maputo, mainly in the guise of texts adorning crowded minibuses and privately owned cars. While often leading to laughter, comments or discussions among passengers and passers-by, these moving names, slogans or warnings are also acknowledged to communicate aspirations for novel forms of sociality, an attack on inter-human separation and lack of empathy, and, finally, an expression of a desire to generate affective room for love, care and mutuality. By mapping the visually affective drawing, Bertelsen and Nassone argue for the anthropological usefulness of generating understandings of African urban spaces that evade single-mindedly emphasizing the ever increasing atomization of collectives or that project necropolitics as being the hegemonic urban be-all and end-all. They also show how this type of textual and interpretative practice actively and critically engages temporality, including descriptions that project the end of the future.

Focusing on gated and pseudo-gated communities that have emerged on the outskirts of Accra, Yekple delves into the resulting loss of agricultural land and the detachment of people from their livelihoods. She draws on a relational place-making perspective to shed light on the livelihood changes of residents in the local community where gated and pseudo-gated communities are located. Empirically, real estate housing projects built on Western-style or 'fantasy' designs in formerly rural areas reconfigure the socio-spatial fabric of peri-urban areas and set in motion a detachment process that disengages people from their agricultural lands and livelihoods. Whether material or social, the transformation of place is the product of changing spatial interactions, experiences and social relations that link people to a specific spatial domain.

Gastrow takes on high-end real estate developments that have shaped Africa's urbanscapes. Drawing on extended interviews with South African investors in urban

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real estate development and management in Africa, this study investigates how imaginations of risk and attempts to control it shape investment. Faced with what they viewed as highly risky investment terrains, investors tried to recreate the financial environments they were familiar with through de-risking practices that sought to enclave projects from the geographies in which they were located. The result was an investment in high-end real estate that was thought to be more controllable, calculable and, most of all, profitable. Enclaving is not just an increasing characteristic of African urbanscapes but also an underlying logic of the formal financial practices that produce them.

Maraire addresses issues of detachment and attachment by examining the contemporary production of luxury residential real estate advertising in the affluent suburbs of Johannesburg. The article depicts how the work of real estate agents not only facilitates financial transactions but also stages reconfigurations and ideological properties of suburban landscapes and a skewed property sector. Along with analysing the visual and textual representations of advertisements, Maraire examines how estate agents cultivate polished, albeit contested, representations of properties for sale. The staging of properties produces associations with intimate relationships, nature, material nostalgia, and 'live, work, play' lifestyles. The properties are also seemingly detached from a highly racialized and unequal property market, and many residents' current anxieties relate to crime, water shortages and electricity crises. This aestheticization of everyday materials harkens back to past ideals, inherently structured socio-spatially by colonial and apartheid segregation policies, while simultaneously signalling new futures for urban dwellings.

Masango and Mkhwanazi examine detachment in the walled city of Johannesburg, framed as visible and invisible, physical and mental, concrete and abstract. They examine concerns about danger and safety, which are important considerations for the middle class when deciding where and how to live. Over the years, artists and writers have pondered Johannesburg's allure and given weight to its generative capacity as a place of creativity and consciousness where even crime is inspiring and inextricable from the fabric of its existence. In Rosebank, new walls are being built daily to detach people from crime. For an older generation that remembers Rosebank in its apartheid and early democracy years, when it was quieter, less racially diverse, and more of a suburban area than a leisure and consumption destination, this change is viewed with concern. In contrast, for the younger generation, these changes are perceived as opening up spaces of possibility. In an increasingly neoliberal world, where enclaving is encouraged through the development of shopping malls, expensive housing and costly cultural and recreational activities, it is unsurprising that youth aspirations in South Africa are seemingly assimilating to this norm without question or protest. Johannesburg's golden yet troubled history shows how the city has shaped contestations of belonging, specifically concerning race and class. These contestations provide the key to understanding Rosebank's enduring legacy and status as an aspirational, youthful and unproblematic space envisaged as being more accessible than nearby Sandton.

Finally, Sumich and Manuel analyse attachment and detachment in Maputo, Mozambique, emphasizing how gated communities are the latest attempt at a social engineering project using the built environment to create a desired urban subject. They trace how utopian ambition and popular aspirations bring these projects into

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being and how a lack of resources and faulty management exacerbate internal tensions that cause them to fall apart. It is argued that the lack of cultural knowledge or the 'one size fits all' authoritarian imposition of a modernizing plan does not necessarily cause these projects to fail. Instead, in a postcolonial order characterized by a conflation between people, nation and state, the failure of such projects is linked to the fact that the right to the city and to citizenship is not the result of the autonomous individual but rather comes through a project of transformative sovereignty.

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