

Being Young in Yeoville

The Method

The research uses **autophotography**, a visual method used growing widely in the social sciences. This is photography conducted by research participants themselves.

Participants were asked **6 questions** which they had to answer through taking photographs:

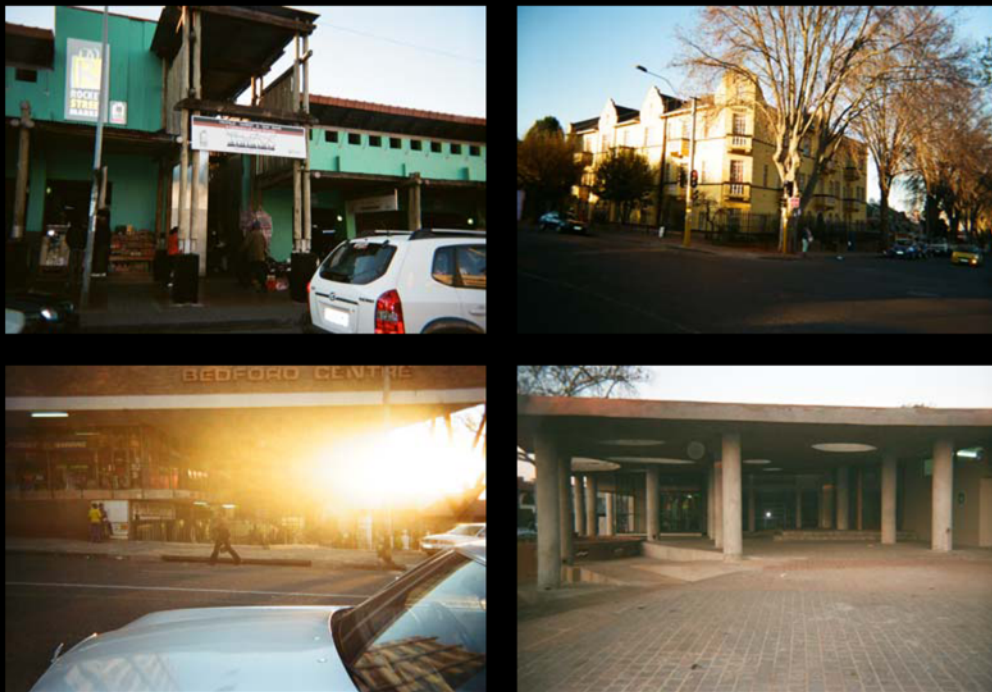
1. What do you like most about Yeoville?
2. What is your favourite place in Yeoville – and why?
3. What kind of people and/or activities would you find in that area?
4. What are the places that are meaningful to you in Yeoville?
5. Which places in Yeoville would you miss the most if you had to go away right now?
6. What would you change about public spaces in Yeoville?

Choosing Yeoville

- Very **diverse neighbourhood**, different from most neighbourhoods I've been to.
Diverse African cultures, social backgrounds and lifestyles
- A **good location to learn** – from other people, their way of life, languages and other qualities we each possess as we go into Yeoville.
- Wished to **document perceptions and experiences** in Yeoville as a neighbourhood in inner city Johannesburg

From the Beginning

- Selection of participants - from a **series of workshops** I was involved in together with second year Urban and Regional Planning students.
Running a project with a class of grade geography 11 students from **Sheikh Anta Diop High School**.
 - Workshops were a good **introduction to the youth** - how they perceive and think about urban spaces in Yeoville.
 - A total of **five students** were then approached to be participants in this research.
- Through **observation**, 5 students that showed a degree of maturity and ability to express themselves were selected.



Behind the Topic

- I am **fascinated by images**. I think that they accurately represent reality and make us aware of things we take for granted everyday, introducing a whole new way of looking at the world.
- I believe photography has the capacity to reveal knowledge, **tell stories** in a more interesting manner and represent the world in its true sense.
- I am inspired by other people's **creativity in the city** – how each one of us does things differently from the next, diverse thought processes and actions. For me, this is what makes the city what it is. The diversity.



Being Young in Yeoville...

- Being young in Yeoville means being **perceptive**.
- There are certain **spaces** the youth identify with more than others. As a youth myself although from outside Yeoville, I am still **explorative**, I want to see everything and public spaces are there for my advantage. This is where as youth meet our friends, the place we go to when we don't want to be home.
- These spaces become our 'sanctuaries' because here we are free, there is **no supervision** and we can freely engage in any activity we wish.
It starts becoming evident how the spaces we associate with shape the way we grow up as youth.





When I arrived in Yeoville, I never got to make friends immediately. My mother was always too protective, she preferred me to stay indoors. I think she was teaching me a lesson because I used to come back late from school. She was worried about the streets, especially Rockey. There are too many drunkards there *[laughs]*

- Leneance

Name: Leneance
Age: 17
Born in: Soweto, Johannesburg where he lived with his grandparents
Length of residence in Yeoville: 7 years
Lives with: Mom, two younger sisters and brother
Dreams of living in: Rosettenville, where it is “nice and quiet and the people are civilised”

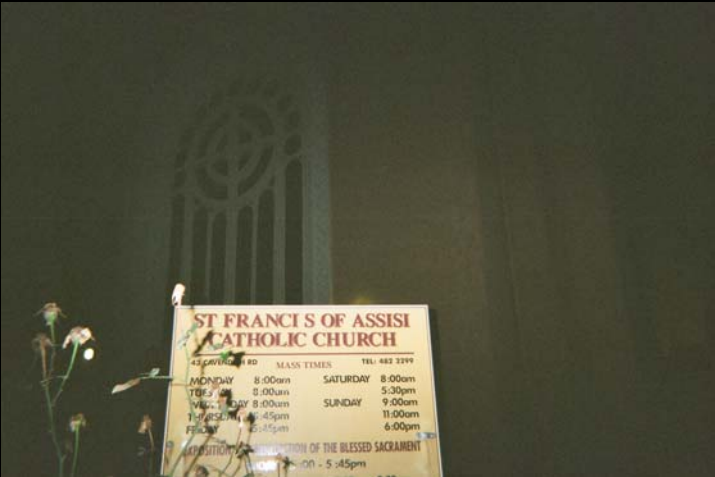
A place I would miss the most



This is where I grew up. This park was close to my house and I spent a lot of time here.

Leneance: “I used to swing... play soccer... yeah, I like... I used to play soccer here with my friends”
Me: “So, now that you’re grown, do you still go to this park?”
Leneance: “[pauses] Mmm... like yeah I go here, I, I come here to chill...”
Me: “To just chill and relax?”
Leneance: “Yeah because now soccer I play in Bez Valley so, yeah...”
Me: “Why do you feel that need to just chill though? Like, you would go here [the park] when what happens exactly?”
Leneance: “When what... *[falters]* like, when like... *[falters again]* when I’m like at home you know, I’ll be like... having nothing to do, only watching TV. You know watching TV sometimes is boring so I come here to, like... just sit and, watching people do their stuff...”

My meaningful space



I grew up as a Catholic. Even when I lived in Soweto I went to a Catholic church. These churches are very old, have a rich history and have been around for many years and they are still here.

Leneance: “...this is where I grew up, in my church. It taught me a lot of lessons”
Me: “Like what though? You keep saying that church is good because it taught you a lot of lessons, what kind of stuff did they teach you that’s helping you now?”
Leneance: “Like... the word of God, yeah. And uhmm... staying out of crime. They always preach that”

What I like about Yeoville



I am very comfortable in this place (Rockey Corner). It has just been renovated. The place is now clean and safer because there is a guard here.

Me: “So what were you thinking when you took this photo, what was going through your mind? Why did you take this photo?”
Leneance: “It’s a very good uhmm... view, like for these tourists *[falters]*, to come and view this place”
Me: “...But how do you interact with it? Do you just look at it from far? Like, what makes it your favourite place in Yeoville, what you like most about Yeoville rather?”
Leneance: “Yeah, you know, there’s a restaurant down there – it sells African food. That’s what I like most about it”

My favourite place in Yeoville



This is my most favourite place in Yeoville - even more than the Game Shop.

Leneance: “Here... from here you get a lot of education. Yeah, you read... there’s internet isn’t there? You research about the world and everything”
Me: “But you can’t play games like you can play games at the Game Shop?”
Leneance: “No here it’s a studying place, you know”
...
Me: “Do you find it better to work here than at home?”
Leneance: “[*interjects*] Yeah it’s better to work here than at home because at home they’ll be sending me to the shops you know, disturbing me and... yeah”

■ ■ ■ ■ ■ Lorraine



Yeoville is different to where I used to live (Durban). When I first came here I thought it was fine because where I used to live it was boring, very quiet but here it is different. I enjoyed being here and that's where I began to make a lot of friends...

- Lorraine

Name: Lorraine

Age: 17

Born in: KZN, Durban

Length of residence in Yeoville: 2 years

Lives with: Mom, Dad, younger brother

Dreams of living in: Norwood because she used to live there and still likes it as it is quiet

My meaningful space



I probably met him after two months of living in Yeoville but after three months he went to the Eastern Cape . He then called me to say he was not coming back...

Me: "This place is also meaningful to you, in the whole of Yeoville. How so? What kind of meaning does it hold for you?"

Lorraine: "[*silence... then clears throat and giggles*] again, I met my first boyfriend"

Me: "Here?"

Lorraine: "By the time I came here [to Yeoville], yeah"

...

Lorraine: "I used to hang here with friends"

Me: "And then you one day met him?"

Lorraine: "Yes"

Me: "What was that like?"

Lorraine: "It was good! [*giggles*]"

What I like about Yeoville



You find pool tables, soccer tables, juke box and the TV if you want to watch. It is simple, very smart.

Me: "What do you like most about this space, the game shop?"

Lorraine: "I like it 'cause... most of the time if I'm bored I just go there... having some fun"

Me: "What would you do when you're there though?"

Lorraine: "Playing snooker, soccer box..."

...

Me: "Is it a comfortable space for you?"

Lorraine: "Yeah, it is a comfortable space"

Me: "And what makes it comfortable for you?"

Lorraine: "'Cause... [*pauses*], there are no old people... [*pauses again*], even if the vandals are there, they won't do anything to us girls"

My meaningful space



Me: "Why is this place meaningful to you?"

Lorraine: "'Cause... I met friends, again"

Me: "Here?"

Lorraine: "Yeah"

Me: "Oh, okay..."

Lorraine: "...and that's where I met my boyfriend"

We met last year... around October. I was sitting on the left hand side (of the pool) and he was inside the water. I was with a friend and he came out of the water. He then pushed me into the water and I pretended like I was drowning so he can save me... [*we both laugh*]

My favourite place in Yeoville



I go to the market every two days, on average. I normally buy veggies, fruits. I feel safe in this market because there are security guards – so I know nothing will happen to me.

Lorraine: "These are Rasta's"

Me: "These are Rastafarian people inside the market? Do you like or not like these people?"

Lorraine: "I like these people"

Me: "What do you like about these people?"

Lorraine: "I like their culture"

Me: "Really?"

Lorraine: "Yah!"

Me: "And?"

Lorraine: "And those things which they're selling here"

Me: "What do you like most about their culture? What have you heard, I don't know anything about them?"

Lorraine: "I like their songs... their dressings"

Norma-Jean



When I came to South Africa I lived in Diepsloot. I was not as free as I used to be back home because of the language barrier. It was difficult to communicate with other children because I could not speak Tswana or Sotho. I came free when I came to Yeoville. Here you meet *Ndebele's, Shona's*, whatever. I did not feel alone anymore.

- Norma-Jean

Name: Norma-Jean
Age: 17
Born in: Bulawayo, Zimbabwe
Length of residence in Yeoville: A year and 5 months
Lives with: Mom and younger brother
Dreams of living in: Strijdom Park - there are house, no flats. It's nice, beautiful and quiet

What I do not like about Yeoville



I cannot walk past this place after 6 in the evening. It is always full of hobos. They make a fire and some-times when you pass by they do these funny things...

Norma-Jean: "This other time, this other guys ran up to me..."
Me: "One of the hobos?"
Norma-Jean: "[interjects] Yeah!"
Me: "And what, chased you away?"
Norma-Jean: "No, and he kissed me on the cheek! Can you imagine?" [we both laugh]
...
Me: "And you don't like it at all [the place], why? They're just trying to have a place to sleep"
Norma-Jean: "Okay... I get that. But ever since that guy ran after me, you know I've always... I hate this place. I hate it. I just hate it [we both laugh]. Maybe if he hadn't done that I would understand but..."

I was not comfortable when taking the picture, someone of "my calibre" is not meant to be seen in such an environment..." [laughs]

My meaningful space



The Yeoville Clinic is meaningful to me because it is free. No one pays for anything. It is good for the community, for people who are less privileged. If you get to be sick or anything like that, you just come here for free.

Norma-Jean: "You know, these people... even come, they always come to our school to talk about whatever issues – teenage pregnancy and stuff like that. If you're traumatised, you come here, you get counsel-ling, and... all of that stuff. It's socially good, and I've never heard any bad stuff about this clinic here. It's always packed... not because people are running after cheap things but, the way you're handled, yeah..."

My favourite place in Yeoville



My street is called Dunbar. This is me standing with my friend on my street (runs up-down in the photo)

Me: "Do you like your street, where you live?"
Norma-Jean: "[interjects] Yho! [exclaims], I love it! "Liking" is an understatement. This one? I really love it, yoh! [exclaims again, we both laugh]
...
Me: "What do you love about it so much?"
Norma-Jean: "Yoh! [exclaims], it's so quiet, you know it's... less *vandals**. When you're stressed, I advise you to come to this street – walk all... just take a taxi from Braamfontein, you come, and you walk in the street. I tell you, you'll go back home relieved, yoh! [exclaims] I tell you"

A place I would change



I don't understand why even people from Pik it Up don't care about this place. They go to every street in Yeoville to collect dust bins but not here. It bothers me a lot because it is near to the shops, I go there almost everyday.

Me: "Do you think it would change completely if it was cleaned up?"
NJ: "No, if you find a completely clean place like this [reffering to a room in the Recreation Centre], it is difficult to take this thing and throw it down [a juice bottle], you see that? But if you find a place like this in the picture you can throw it down and you won't even feel guilty.
...
Me: "So, this makes it a really un-comfortable place to be in?"
NJ: "No... No, I'm heartbroken [laughs], so heartbroken..."

Yolander



Here in Yeoville there is more freedom as compared to Bulawayo. I can take walks, roam around. In Bulawayo you can't walk around as freely because of the police, they are just too strict

- Yolander

Name: Yolander

Age: 17

Born in: Bulawayo, Zimbabwe

Length of residence in Yeoville: 10 years

Lives with: Mom, Dad, two younger siblings

Dreams of living in:

My meaningful space



My school plays an important role in my life. My principal has motivated me to work hard.

Yolander: "...and [*falters*]... the different people... you know, as teens, we share a lot of stuff"

Me: "Yeah... what kind of stuff, interests or..?"

Yolander: "Yeah interests, ideas, we share ideas, opinions and different stuff

...

Me: "Is there a lot of people that are from different... sort of like cultures or like African countries..?"

Yolander: "[*interjects*] African countries. Zambia, Malawi, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Congo, Mozambique..."

What I do not like about Yeoville



There is a lot of drug dealers around this place and too much alcohol. My church is close to this area and they always come to interrupt services whenever we have.

Me: "How is that visible when you're on the streets, do people come outside drinking? 'cause I know it's illegal to be drinking in the streets"

Yolander: "[*interjects*] yeah, people come out drunk, drinking, carrying beer... and... they... I see teenagers coming out of those places, and it's not good... [*pauses*], and some girls, you know, they... they always pass by here 'cause they do prostitution, and they know that they gonna get people, you know..."

My favourite place in Yeoville



This is the place where I grew up. When I moved to Yeoville in 2000, I moved in this building.

Me: "So what still makes it your favourite place? What kind of memories do you have?"

Yolander: "Uhhh, 'cause it's... see behind the flat, that's where..."

Me: "On the other side?"

Yolander: "Uh-huh! There's, uhhh, my best friend since, like... crèche"

Me: "Yeah... your best friend lives there... on the other side?"

Yolander: "Uh-huh! And I used to, like, sneak out, you know [*laughs*], and go there 'cause it's like, there's some kind of a... garage, so you can jump there then go inside that house"

Me: "Oh... that's where your friend lived?"

Yolander: "Uh-huh! And she still lives there"

A place I would change



I once got in trouble because of her, my friend. I feel like Times Square has a huge role to play in some of the mistakes the youth make. I would go there if none of these bad things were happening.

Yolander: "No, I'd totally remove the place!"

Me: "Totally?"

Yolander: "Totally!"

Me: "Why?"

Yolander: "[*sighs*] This place... [*pauses*] a friend of mine – she's got like... lots of boyfriends, 'sugar daddies'. She always comes here, to this place in there. See these flats, whatever they are? You find a lot of school kids In there believe me..."

Me: "Yeah?"

Yolander: "...and that's not right"

Me: "Wow..."

Yolander: "This place gives an opportunity for those 'sugar daddies', whatever, and those teenagers, you know... hopeless teenagers"

Yeoville from Youth Eyes



Norma-Jean

In her own words, she maintains "someone of my caliber is not meant to be in such a dirty place". Norma-Jean is very critical of the condition of public spaces in Yeoville, their deteriorating state such as the pollution, degrading nature of buildings, streets and parks. She also appreciates social amenities such as the Yeoville Clinic, where she maintains it is good as poorer residents can have access to such facilities. She also shows concern for her three younger brothers who she feels responsible for, talks about how dirty spaces could affect their health.

Leneance

Is concerned largely about the kind of image Yeoville sends out as a neighbourhood in Johannesburg and to the rest of the world (especially during the World Cup period), the aesthetic qualities of public spaces in the area. He makes a reference to Rocky Corner and holds that if buildings in Yeoville would be renovated or kept in a condition such as Rocky Corner, the neighbourhood would be able to attract more people and he would also be proud to tell people he is from Yeoville.

Rodreck

Rodreck makes interesting comparisons between Yeoville as his neighbourhood and Harare, Zimbabwe where he has born. He talks about the different socialization processes evident in both the urban areas and maintains that there is a higher level of discipline in Harare and this can be seen in public spaces as well. He loves Yeoville [and Johannesburg] as there are more opportunities here. Personal growth is therefore his core concern and he is glad that public spaces such as the Yeoville library/Hotel Yeoville facilitate his desire to be successful in life.

Lorraine

Lorraine appreciates the fact that public spaces in Yeoville are able to support and enable relationships to emerge. She maintains that this is particularly good in a neighbourhood such as Yeoville where there are migrants coming here, having to start a new life with new people. Hence public spaces are there to help with that, ensure that one does not always have to be alone and in their own private spaces all the time but that they are provided with a opportunity to engage with other people in the community.

Yolander

Shows a profound concern for the youth generation and how they conduct themselves, they kind of things they are exposed to in different public spaces – particularly the female youth. She maintains that although it is a positive thing to have a variety of activities, people in spaces, and some people always have ulterior motives to exploit the youth because some of them are vulnerable. According to her, this makes it easier for the youth to make mistakes that often affect their futures. She is therefore vigilant in public spaces and the way she interacts with them, as she does not want to find herself in a compromising situation.

What is common?

All participants emphasized the importance of both places of entertainment (Times Square, Recreation Center and Park, Bedford Game Shop, Swimming Pool, Tennis Court) and places of learning (School, Library). While this does not come as a surprise, I did not expect to see a facility such as the library to be perceived as a friendly and comfortable space in which one can just be: all were acutely aware of how crucial education is for them as they grow up.

Yeoville was unanimously seen as a place of social encounters and rich diversity: these features were understood as key elements enhancing individual freedom. Compared to other places (in South Africa or in Zimbabwe), Yeoville was described as a place where one can walk and interact freely, feel at ease in the street, speak one's language, expose and explore one's identity. But this freedom comes with a cost – bad encounters, lack of social discipline, a degree of violence and crime ('vandals'). These negative aspects of Yeoville life were experienced either in isolated areas ('Snake road', vacant lots, place 'behind Shoprite'), or in the very same entertainment places most participants enjoy (Times Square, Game Shop, clubs). These risks were more important for female participants.

Despite a shared feeling that Yeoville is degraded in many aspects, needs a serious revamp and better management, it appears that the youth enjoys a variety of facilities in Yeoville, encouraging self and collective development.

What differs?

Broadly, the male participants are more explorative of Yeoville as their neighbourhood. They have a larger variety with regards to the place they have photographed and these spaces are scattered over Yeoville, not necessarily around the recreation centre as the core.

Time Square

Len: I like this place, this is where I groove, have fun and meet new people. I leave when people start to get drunk because out will never what can come out, some people will be looking for trouble.

Yola: I would totally remove this place, I do not like it. It exposes young, vulnerable girls to things they should not be doing at their age.

Game Shop

Yola: A game shop should not have alcohol inside it. I went there once, and I was scared of going in. that time there was also a lot of vandals and I don't like that because they always talk to you in a threatening way. Now if I want to play games I go to the courts, not the game shop. At some point there was a kid that was injured there, hit by a bottle inside the game shop. That frightened me even more.

Len: this is my favourite place because I get to play my favourite game – pool. I also like it because of the jukebox, there is music.