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## **Everyday Encounters in the Shopping Mall: (Un)making Boundaries in the Divided Cities of Johannesburg and Mostar**

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**Abstract:** The many studies that see shopping malls as places of power, control and exclusion have often neglected the potential of malls as places of encounters. Drawing on ethnographic data from the divided cities of Johannesburg in South Africa and Mostar in Bosnia-Herzegovina, we examine the ways in which urban dwellers who enter the mall from a marginalised position – poor black urban dwellers at a regional, middle class and white-dominated mall in Johannesburg and Bosniak city dwellers at a mall located in the Croat part of Mostar – use the mall, what kind of relations they build to others and how they rework boundaries of race, class, religion and ethnicity at the mall. Rather than being spaces that strengthen and reproduce centre-margins relations, urban dwellers appropriate them as places where these relations become reworked.

**Keywords:** shopping malls, divided cities, everyday encounters, urban marginality, Mostar, Johannesburg

## Introduction

Shopping malls have attracted a lot of interest among academics. One can delineate two opposing approaches towards malls in academia: the one strand sees malls as materialisations of the globalised economy, of globalised consumptionscapes and of ever greedy real estate capitalism; they are seen as spaces which only serve desires of the elites, exclude others and hence increase urban fragmentation and segregation. The other strand recognises shopping malls as new social and even public spaces promising encounters and formation of new socialities. They are privately-owned, tightly secured spaces, yet they are also more than this. In this article, we would like to build on this second strand of research and investigate the social meanings of shopping malls in cities characterised by inequality, a violent past and patterns of segregation that are hard to be dissolved. Johannesburg and Mostar, as cases in point, are both cities where processes of urban marginalisation are not only an important aspect of urban life, they actually characterise the experience of the urban for a majority of urban dwellers. In Johannesburg, the apartheid laws and economies produced a society based on race, with draconian urban segregation and restrictions to citizenship for the non-‘White’ population. Although about twenty-five years have passed since the end of apartheid, the society continues to have one of the highest Gini-coefficients worldwide; racial discrimination in terms of laws has long been abolished, yet continued economic exclusion forces many black urban dwellers to live in underserved, densely populated ‘townships’ (areas where during apartheid the non-‘White’ population was supposed to live). Mostar is divided along ethno-religious lines since the Bosnian wars (1992-1995). Today, the city has two parts, East and West, which are dominated, respectively, by city dwellers that are commonly called Bosniaks (who are generally of Muslim faith) and Bosnian Croats (who are mostly Catholics). The city was administratively divided until 2005; however, even though many years have passed since then, the demographic structure of the city has not changed and the inner-city border continues to structure the lives of the people.

In both cities, shopping malls are increasingly important in public life. Although in the relevant literature there is a general perception that shopping malls are spaces of exclusion, in both Mostar and Johannesburg marginalised urban dwellers also venture to the malls and participate, in one way or the other, in the forms of sociality emerging there. In this article, we focus on two such malls – Greenstone Shopping Centre in Johannesburg and Rondo Shopping Centre (Tržni Centar Rondo) in Mostar – and we inquire how urban dwellers who enter the mall from a marginalised position – poor black urban dwellers at a regional, middle class and white-dominated mall in Johannesburg, Bosniak city dwellers at a mall located in the Croat section of Mostar – interact in this ‘foreign territory’. We ask what kind of relations they build with others and how they rework boundaries of race, class, religion and ethnicity at the mall. Based on the ethnography of users of a South African and a Bosnian mall, we argue that shopping malls should not be seen as disconnected enclaves, but rather as spaces which – entangled with many other spaces of the city – contribute to the construction of self and other as well as to the reassessment of social boundaries in the city. Rather than being spaces that strengthen and reproduce centre-margins relations, urban dwellers appropriate them as places where these relations become reworked. The ethnographic data stem from two separate research projects, yet the methods used were similar. In Johannesburg (Heer) and in Mostar

(Aceska) the anthropologists participated in everyday life, accompanied urban dwellers on trips to the mall in the forms of ‘go alongs’ (Kusenbach 2003) and engaged in informal conversations and ethnographic interviews where urban dwellers recounted stories about past trips to and encounters at the mall.

### **Shopping Malls as Places of Encounters**

In the past few decades, malls have been studied as places of power, control and exclusion. Historically, they have been seen as descendants of the European ‘Passage’ that was invented in European cities at the turn to the nineteenth century (Watson 2009, 55). They distinguish themselves from other forms of urban markets (Wehrheim 2007) by being highly regulated spaces with elaborated mechanisms of security and control, with rules set up and enforced by the private owners and often with very clear spatial boundaries which set them apart from the surrounding state-managed urban spaces. Accessibility of shopping malls is subject to many limitations and rules imposed and sanctioned by the mall management. Helten (2007) hence suggests seeing shopping malls as total institutions (Goffman 1961). Reminiscent of the asylum, the mall entails a high degree of control and regulation of people’s behaviour. Many shopping malls show in their architectural designs a resemblance to the panopticon and prisons (Helten 2007, 245). However, power and control are often not manifest and directly oppressive, but rather ‘exercised through a seductive spatial arrangement, where the experience of being in the space is itself the expression of power’ (Allen 2006, 454). Shopping malls have become symbols of the loss of public space within the context of increased privatisation and commercialisation of cities (e.g. Sorkin 1992). Urban scholars have assumed that the mall is a phenomenon of the globalised economy which diminishes locality and human agency (Salcedo 2003; Olivier 2008). They are seen as spaces of contrived hyperconsumption, consumer fantasy and social control (Salcedo 2003; Miles 2010, Dirsuweit 2009; Mbembe 2004; Miller, Nel and Hampwaye 2008; Fu und Murray 2014; Marks und Bezolli 2001). They limit political and democratic practices like demonstrations (Németh 2009). By excluding the poor and other marginalised groups, they are seen as constituting fortress-like, exclusionary, elitist spaces sanitised of poverty and decay (Dirsuweit 2009; Dirsuweit und Schattauer 2004). They contribute to the fragmentation of the urban landscape and are drivers of postmodern forms of segregation (Murray 2008, 2011, 2013; Caldeira 2000; Davis 2006 [1990]; Paasche und Sidaway 2010). The anthropologist Caldeira (2000) went even one step further and coined the notion ‘fortified enclave’, under which she subsumes gated communities, offices complexes and shopping malls.

In this article, we distance ourselves from popular metaphors – like Caldeira’s ‘fortified enclave’ – that treat malls as disconnected from the social and spatial environment that is surrounding them. Understanding shopping malls as ‘enclaves’ has many shortcomings. For example, it implies that the users of the mall constitute a homogeneous group, clearly delineated from people who do not frequent the mall. Yet, as this article will show, in both Mostar and Johannesburg they can be seen as spaces of religious, economic and ethnic diversity. What is also problematic about the metaphor of enclave is that it is based on a

container model of space – an outdated conception of space (Bachmann-Medick 2006, 289), which assumes that space determines the action of its users and hence their agency. We understand space rather in the sense of Lefebvre (1996), as an on-going process, a production, in which the agency of the users plays a key role (see the introduction to this special issue by Aceska, Heer and Kaiser-Grolimund 2019). Despite the tight surveillance technologies and restrictions in accessibility as constraining structural conditions, urban dwellers can to a certain degree ‘appropriate’ these spaces (Carrier 1996) and turn them into spaces of sociality, self-stylisation (Nuttall 2004) and leisure. The visitors of the mall are not passively subjugated to the capitalist logic prescribed by mall builders. Over time and often in hidden, subtle, unsteady ways, spatial practice and lived space arrive at the ‘jungle of functionalist rationality’ (Certeau 1984, xviii). By acting in and on space, urban dwellers imbue malls with meanings, memories and dreams and they become constituted as lived space (Lefebvre 1996) through the users’ agency. A further problematic aspect of the metaphor of enclave is that it overstates the spatial and social rupture between malls and the surrounding city, while removing attention from the manifold connections between them. Stressing separation and segregation, this metaphor turns invisible the many entanglements and relations with the ‘outside’ which are as constitutive for the malls as the ruptures. Understanding malls as enclave is a form of what Ash Amin calls ‘telescopic urbanism’ (Amin 2013), namely a sense that the city is ‘a collection of settlements with varied geographies of affiliation rather than as the sum of its parts’ and not a ‘field of shared life and common rights’ (Amin 2013, 477).

This article focuses on the micro-level of shopping malls and engages with the ways in which socially and politically marginalised groups in divided cities make sense of practices associated with malling. Instead of adopting narrow models that see malls only as contexts of urban marginalisation and segregation, this article engages with theories that show that human agency and locality play an important role in the construction of relations in – and about – the mall in cities divided along racial, ethnic and/or class lines. In recent years, scholars have already engaged with research that emphasises the agency of urban dwellers in shopping malls and its potentials for giving room for new forms of publics and public life (Heer 2017; Houssay-Holzschuch and Teppo 2009; Leeuwen 2011; Nuttall 2004; Perez, Salcedo and Caceres 2012; Underhill 2004; van Eeden 2006; Vries 2008; Murray 1997). In post-apartheid South Africa, for example, spaces like malls still carry the imprint of apartheid ideologies, but it is through the agency of urban dwellers - their ways of appropriating and reinterpreting malls - that new forms of being together can emerge (Houssay-Holzschuch und Teppo 2009, see below). At the mall The Zone in Johannesburg, a new generation of South Africans, black middle-class youth, create a specific urban culture, mixing the styles of the township and the city (Nuttall 2004). Rather than being archetypical globalised spaces contributing to the homogenisation of global consumer cultures, malls become ‘expressions of a negotiation’ between mall developers shaped by global logics of capital accumulation and the urban dwellers’ local practices and culture (Perez, Salcedo and Caceres 2012, 1084-5). The urbanites’ agency transforms malls into locally specific places embedded in social meanings and cultures. Bringing agency into the analysis of malls can hence be seen as a way

of ‘provincialising’ urban theory because it invites for an analysis of cities like Johannesburg and Mostar beyond metanarratives like globalisation and crisis (Mbembe and Nuttall 2004).

In a wider context, this article also engages with the recently emerging literatures that focus on the ways in which difference is negotiated and lived out in everyday settings (see for example Gilroy 2006; Wise and Velayutham 2009; Wilson 2011). In addition, in urban scholarship there is a vast literature on urban encounter taking place in a variety of public spaces: scholars have studied the ways in which the café is a place for social encounter, but also for class divides (see, for example, Puel and Fernandez 2012, Ellis 2004, Oldenburg 1989), the ways markets have been places of diversity in the urban space (see Busch 2010, Liu 2010) and the street as a particular place for urban encounter (see Hall 2011, 2012, Anderson 2000). From a theoretical point of view, ethnographies of urban encounters promise to ‘denaturalise’ cities, malls and urban marginality, by bringing to the fore the ‘engagements across the difference that constitute these categories’ (Faier and Rofel 2014, 369).

This paper takes the perspective of urban anthropology and emphasises the role of place in understanding malls. Inspired by the work of Massey, among others, we understand malls as relational and constructed places: they are constructed out of articulations of social relations and, as such, they are always ‘in the making’ (Massey 1993, 1994). Places are not contexts in which actors ‘act’, but they are products of insiders’ and outsiders’ definitions that are constructed on the bases of the perceived identities and places from outside. People come to perceive their relationship to place by moving into and out of places. Through the process of boundary-work they construct definitions of what is ‘our’, ‘my’ place in opposition to ‘their’ place. Appadurai (1996) introduced the notion of translocality to best capture the need to rethink the link between place and identities: translocality means that the territorial links of identity are problematised practices which reconstitute these identities and places beyond the boundaries of fixed territory. This understanding of place is especially important when studying cities marked by divisions, like Mostar and Johannesburg, as in these cities, more than anywhere else, one can witness the implicit and explicit association of places to certain groups of people: the Greenstone mall in Johannesburg is commonly viewed – by users and urban professionals alike – as a place of the middle-class white people and the mall Rondo in West Mostar as a place of the Bosnian Croats. Cities divided along racial, ethnic and/or class lines are often embedded in dualistic metaphors of our/their places that need to be approached critically in order to understand the ways people are attached to places in these cities. Thus, we closely engage with the works of Rosaldo (1988), Gupta and Ferguson (1992), Gupta (1992) and Rodman (1992), to argue that the implicit mapping of cultures onto places should be questioned by academics. Rodman has suggested that ‘by joining multilocality to multivocality, we can look “through” these places, explore their links with others, consider why they are constructed as they are, see how places represent people, and begin to understand how people embody places’ (Rodman 1992, 652).

In the spirit of this special issue, the theoretical framework in which we place this paper is open to various interpretations of what we call ‘urban margins’: while malls indeed can be seen as places of exclusion and segregation, it is important not to define them as enclaves in

the city or as settings in which marginalisation of certain groups of people take place, but to conceptualise them as socially and culturally relative places that are constructed out of articulations of social relations and, as such, they are always ‘in the making’. Building on this understanding of malls, we will present ethnographic material about social practices by marginalised urban dwellers enacted at a mall in post-apartheid Johannesburg and at a mall in post-conflict Mostar.

### **Ephemeral Encounters at a Mall in Johannesburg**

The Greenstone Shopping Centre is located in proximity to Alexandra and Linbro Park, two neighbourhoods in what is today Region E of the City of Johannesburg. Separated only by a national highway, the two neighbourhoods exemplify the massive spatial and economic inequality characteristic of the post-apartheid city. Linbro Park, a peri-urban suburb, is home to about 2000 people (own estimation), many of them white and affluent, and has a population density of about 400 people per square kilometre. Alexandra, a historically black township, is home to a population of probably over 340,000 people (Alexandra Renewal Project) on a surface area of about eight square kilometres (800 hectares) and hence has a density of 42,000 people per square kilometre. Although the poor township and the affluent suburban worlds tend to be represented as disconnected and segregated from each other (most prominently in Murray 2011), there are many connections and interdependencies: for example economic dependencies and resulting everyday interactions at work places, being together at churches and political contestations of urban land, which constitute ambivalent and contested spaces of encounters (Heer 2015, 2017). The Greenstone shopping mall is also such a space of urban co-presence of residents of these neighbourhoods.

Greenstone Shopping Centre is generally viewed by affluent urbanites as a white-dominated, affluent mall, yet in reality black, poor township dwellers also frequent it regularly. They can be distinguished into at least four groups: Firstly, there are better-off township dwellers who own a car and drive to Greenstone or another mall daily to buy groceries. Secondly, Alexandra residents with little income frequent the mall and other shops in the area whenever there are promotions for low prices. When they hear about sales, they organise car sharing with neighbours or save money to pay for the mini-bus taxi. Thirdly, many young people from Alexandra go to Greenstone as an ‘outing’; with or without money they appropriate the mall as a space for leisure. Especially on Saturdays, young people from Alexandra come to the mall with their romantic partners or friends in order to stroll around and maybe buy something, depending on how much money they have. Typically, they would refer to these outings without buying anything as ‘window shopping’. And lastly, many young township dwellers work as sales persons in the mall, meaning that they connect the mall and the township by commuting between home and work.

Nnana, a young women living in a shack in Alexandra, was living a life with many economic uncertainties, sometimes working part-time in a coffee shop or as a domestic worker in nearby suburbs. She considered her life as difficult in 2012 and lacked perspectives for her future. The lack of private space in the small shack she shared with her family was difficult

for her, especially when she was angry or stressed. In order to avoid fighting at home, she would sometimes escape to the mall:

Maybe I fought yesterday with my boyfriend or had an argument with my mum. Then I go out, to a mall, I just window shop and when I come back, I am okay. That thing is, you know, it's gone! I don't know why, but shopping makes me complete. Serious! If I am not shopping, I'll rather go to church. That's where I can calm down. I also love to eat if I am angry. When something is stressful, like right now we don't have money to go to school, my mum is the only one who is working, she has to make sure that we have cloths, that we have something to eat at the end of the day and that we don't sleep on the streets. So sometimes that's when I go out, window shop. And when I come back, I am better again. Is that normal? (Nnana, ca. 23, , 07.06.2012)

For Nnana, being at the mall was like entering a dreamlike world which allowed her to forget about the difficulties of everyday life. Window shopping became a form of escapism and a cleansing experience with a similar effect like going to church. Being at the mall without money could be 'painful' for Nnana, as she said, but this would not keep her from going to there. Entering this 'beautiful' place and being in the shiny world of consumption is experienced by many of my female interlocutors from Alexandra as rejuvenation, as an escape from their lives full of economic hardship and strained social relations.

As soon as Nnana would get money, either from her boyfriend or from her jobs, she would buy groceries and clothing first for her family and only second for herself. When Nnana went with money in her pocket to the cheaper clothing stores at the mall, she knew exactly what was missing in the wardrobe of her mother, her sister, her brother and her niece with whom she was living and looked for bargains to replace the missing clothes. She hardly ever bought something for herself only. She would try to hide, though, from her boyfriend that she would spend his money on her family, as she did not want him to think that she depended on him financially and was only with him for the money.

Nnana did not have a lot of money, but she nevertheless managed to stylise her body as a young, fashionable urban woman by buying cloths at cheap stores like PQ Clothing. Nnana and other interviewees from Alexandra expressed in interviews that they were positively surprised to see white people in this and other low-cost shops in Greenstone mall:

'PQ is very, very, very, very, cheap. And you would be surprised, white people go and shop there. Serious! I went there with my mam one time, and I was like 'Mama, white people come here and buy!' (Nnana, ca. 23, , 07.06.2012)

Looking together for bargains and knowing that also the other is concerned about affordable prices creates a sense of what we propose to call 'shopping solidarity'. In situations of shopping solidarity, usual social boundaries are crossed and ephemeral feelings of equality and togetherness based on similar shopping concerns, namely finding bargains and taking care of dependents, emerge. Seeing that white women, stereotypically seen as wealthy by townships dwellers, also shop for bargains produces positive feelings:

‘Everyone wants what they want, you know. When I enter a shop today in Alexandra mall, I find a woman, when I go to Greenstone mall, I find a mother doing the shopping. I am like ‘Madam, this is so expensive, how food costs too much’ And then we talk about it. (Bertha, ca. 30, resident of River Park, interview, 7.6.2012)

Shopping solidarity, then, entails an instantaneous sense of solidarity among female strangers who shop side by side and who share the concerns to care for their dependents and households. Nnana and other women from Alexandra would comment on the goods that the fellow white shopper was looking at. Brief, friendly conversations would emerge in which the two shoppers would complain about the rising grocery prices or recommend each other to buy a certain clothing piece. Sometimes also men would start talking to her in shops and ask for her opinion about a piece of clothing they were buying for their girlfriends. Those tiny interactions constitute an important part of the pleasurable experience at the mall: ‘You get to meet different people from different places, you know, you get to know how they operate’ (Nnana, ca. 23, 07.06.2012).

To go to Greenstone, women from Alexandra would dress up and put on fashionable cloths. Styling one's body, clothing choice and hairstyles are used by mall visitors to initiate small interactions with strangers. When I accompanied Nnana to the mall, I was surprised to see how often she was complimented for her careful choice of dress and hairstyle by women of all kinds of social backgrounds and age groups walking past us. Also shared interest in fashion could entice such instances of positive social encounters between female strangers at the mall. Sometimes Nnana would also initiate a conversation, but if she felt – based on what she interpreted as a disinterested face of the other - that the person did not want to communicate with her, she would interpret this as a re-enactment of racial boundaries.

‘Maybe 99% of them they still have that thing what white people and black people are not supposed to be shopping together, living together, you know, that thing is still there.’ (Nnana, ca. 23, 07.06.2012)

Basani, a 26-year-old woman who was living with her boyfriend in Nnana's yard, remembered one negative experience with a white man at the mall. She was standing in the line to draw money from an ATM and the white man in front of her asked her to move backwards. She asked why and he responded: ‘You are too close, I need air.’ She then talked

with her friend in the local language XiTsonga and the white man got angry, complaining that they were insulting him. In the interview she speculated about his intentions, wondering whether he was thinking that she as a black woman wanted to steal his money and was therefore standing so close to him in the queue.

Observing each other's clothing, though, could also be a cause for negative social encounters. Especially black affluent youth, Nnana explained, would look down on her in her cheap jeans from PQ and her second-hand t-shirt bought at Johannesburg Central Business District. She would notice how they commented about her clothes when walking past. But taste cannot be bought, and Nnana invested a lot of time thinking about how she could combine a certain shoe with a hair piece and a t-shirt:

They don't even look good in what they are wearing, although it's expensive. Now I am wearing things that cost, maybe like my whole body, R150. But I am looking good and I am feeling good. You may have money, but you are not better than me. (Nnana, ca. 23, field collaborator from River Park 07.06.2012)

So the mall becomes a place of competition among youths equipped with very different resources. Managing to look good and to receive compliments, even though with cheap clothes, gives Nnana a sense of victory and achievement. These competitions are not about race, but about being good-looking and fashionable. Her own body and her sense of taste become a resource in this youthful competition for attention (Fuh 2009; Nuttall 2004).

As we have argued above, divided cities are often represented in dualistic terms of our/their places; such representations of urban spaces need to be approached critically, as they do not necessarily reflect the ways in which people really create attachment to place in these cities. From the point of view of white suburbanites, Greenstone mall is clearly a 'white' and suburban space, belonging to 'their' social world, considered as separate and distinct from township ways of life. In their suburban way of looking at the mall, the presence of township dwellers becomes invisible. In the early days of this research I talked to a politician about my research interest in the Greenstone mall. He belonged himself to a white, suburban milieu and was at that time councillor for the ward in which the Greenstone mall is located. He reacted with surprise when he heard that I was interested in how township dwellers use the mall, as in his view people from Alexandra would not shop at Greenstone. When I told his comment to Nnana's mother Agnes, a domestic worker living in Alexandra and working in the suburb Linbro Park, she wanted to know whether this politician was black or white. When I responded that he was white, she said: 'Ah, some white people think we can't go shopping where they go because they think we can't afford. But even with little money we can go there and shop' (Agnes, 17.04.2012). This example expresses how strong the association of spaces and worldviews with racial groups continues to be in Johannesburg: so strong that mall users who belong to the majority group do not even notice the presence of marginalised urban dwellers. Affluent residents from Linbro Park and other suburbs paid little attention to mall users who did not belong to their own social world. When asked about their experiences at

the mall, they would usually refer to shops and the routines of grocery shopping, but rarely bring up encounters with people from other milieus. When I asked Sarah, a resident from Linbro Park managing a veterinarian store at Greenstone, whether residents from Alexandra also frequent the mall, she responded: ‘I think they do, because (laughs) I know they have an awful lot of problems there with security’ (Sarah, ca. 66, property owner in Linbro Park and shop manager at Greenstone mall, interview, 17.05.2012). Portraying Alexandra's residents not as consumers, but as security threats, she explained how the management put in speed bumps and personalised controls at the security booms in order to reduce the car thefts. When I asked her about black customers at her store she responded that she had very few as ‘the poor black hasn't got anything to eat himself, he won't go and buy a bag of hills food for his dog.’ But the growing black middle class, she acknowledged, is starting to ‘get into animals and nurturing and that’ (Sarah, ca. 66, property owner in Linbro Park and shop manager at Greenstone mall, interview, 17.05.2012).

There is a considerable disjunction between the suburbanites’ perception of the mall as ‘their’ place and the really-existing appropriation of the mall by township dwellers who regularly cross the spatial and social divide between township and the mall and who use the mall for buying things, window shopping and enjoying the diverse urban publics. Through practices of stylising their bodies, participating in the competition for attention and enjoying little instances of shopping solidarity, women from townships playfully turn the shopping mall into a place they feel they also belong to.

### **Shopping ‘on the Other Side’ in Mostar**

The first time we walked together to the mall Rondo in West Mostar, Maja, a law student and dweller of East Mostar, felt the need to explain – or maybe even justify herself – that she is going to the ‘other side’ as she needs something specific. ‘They are our enemies’, she said explicitly, making sure that her practice of going to ‘the other side’ is put in the right context. To understand why one would call the city dwellers of the other half of the city ‘enemies’, one needs to understand the complex social, economic and political context in which the city of Mostar has found itself in the years after the Bosnian wars (1992-95). The city was severely damaged in the Bosnian wars: most residential areas, representative buildings and religious objects were ruined. The post-war rebuilding of the city happened in a complex situation, mainly dominated by ethnic politics on both local and state level (for more see Aceska 2016; Wimmen 2004; Grodach 2002). Bosnia-Herzegovina was one of the six federal states of Socialist Yugoslavia and the war marked two transitions of the city: from an ethnically mixed to an ethnically divided city and from a socialist to a post-socialist city. In such a context, many new private shopping malls were built in the post-socialist period for the first time; the state-owned ones from the socialist period were ruined in the war and not rebuilt. However, due to the complex and uneven economic development on both sides of the city, most new malls were built on the West side of the city – so Maja and her friends who live in East Mostar need to cross the border and go to the other side in order to visit a new modern mall. This case study is devoted to this experience – shopping in the mall on the other side of the city. The ethnographic research was conducted in the period 2010 – 2017 in one of

the first malls that was built in post-war West Mostar, the Rondo mall. In 2010, at the beginning of this research, Rondo was a very popular mall, with many new shops, bars and restaurants. In 2017, most of the shops were closed and the mall has lost its popularity due to the rising number new malls on that side of the city. The ‘walk-alongs’ with Maja to the mall Rondo happened several times and they were always insightful; I was an ethnographer going home with tons of notes after such an experience. She appeared to be very comfortable in the mall. She knew her way around and all the shortcuts; sometimes she would have small talk with the shop assistants, showing that there is continuity in her visits to these shops. She also liked being there, as she said. She likes the idea of combining colours, accessorising her dresses and shirts and getting a good deal on nice pieces of clothing during big sales. While she knows that the shop assistants can quickly realise that she is from the other side, mainly from her accent, she has decided not to be bothered by that so much anymore. And yet, even though her place in the mall was always defined as a woman/consumer ‘from the other side’, the ways in which she negotiated boundaries herself with city dwellers from both sides is significant. In the mall she explained to me where women shop for what; where one can find more elegant or cheaper or cooler things. However, when talking about fashion or shopping, she would almost always group women (and sometimes men) mainly by their fashion sense and put herself in the group of ‘cool, not quite elegant women, who like to look *mladalacki* (youngish)’. She would use ‘we’ to refer to the women in the city of the same fashion taste, regardless of their place of residence or ethnic belonging. Once she even said explicitly that she belongs to those women in the city that like to be *in*, to wear things the same way and these women can be seen more on the ‘other (Croat) side’. ‘They’ were not the Croat women who live in West Mostar, but ‘they’ are those who like wearing high heels during the day or very elegant clothes or those who do not invest in the idea of looking good, regardless of which side of Mostar they live in. This kind of construction of togetherness in the divided city is in line with our understanding of identities and places: people come to perceive their relationship to place by moving into and out of places and through the process of boundary-work they construct definitions of what is ‘our’, ‘their’ places.

This experience of being a Bosniak woman from East Mostar who is shopping in the malls in West Mostar is not without any problems. While browsing and trying on clothes could be the same in any other city or in any other mall, at the tills one could still see the ways in which ethnic boundaries are being constructed in the city: a known fact among the city dwellers was that on the side of the city where the mall is one could also use the currency ‘kuna’ from the neighbouring country Croatia to purchase things in the mall. Maja always paid with the local, Bosnian currency called ‘convertible marks’; she owned Croatian ‘kunas’ from her visit to the Croat coast, but she did not want to use them while being in Bosnia. She explained that even many consumers among the Bosnian Croats use the local ‘convertible marks’ too, but the fact that ‘kunas’ can be used on that side of the city is not surprising to her at all. These exclusionary practices reconfirmed her place at the margins ‘on the other side’ of the city, where one could not pay with ‘kunas’, yet with her presence at the mall, she tried to actively renegotiate and resist this marginalisation. Being at the mall hence becomes political, a ‘politics of presence’ (see Aedo in this special issue).

Lejla bought her graduation dress ‘on the other side’. She had just graduated at the Department of Economics at the university of East Mostar, one of the two universities in the divided city. She explained to me that in most cases students study at the university on the side of the city where they live. However, shopping for clothes is different: the young people from the Croat side never come to the Bosniak side for shopping, but the people from the Bosniak side almost always have to go to the other side if they need something specific. Lejla first tried to find something on her side of the city, but as she didn’t manage to find the perfect dress there, she did not hesitate to go the malls on the Croat side. She did not mind that her dress is from the other side, as she explained to me. However, she was not sure whether she should tell her father about it and once she discussed it with her mother, she decided to play it safe and tell her father that she bought her dress from the main shopping street on their side of the city, Fejicheva Street.

Going to the malls on other side was an act of rebellion against the divided city, she explained. She was convinced that the younger generations like hers should overcome the ethnic divides and build a different city. When I asked her what exactly is rebellious about shopping on the ‘other side’, she illustrated her answer with a story: one day that summer she went to the other side to buy a linen summer dress. However, when she asked one shop assistant whether they have linen dresses in the shop, she told her that she is surprised to see a woman from the other side that likes linen, implying that women from the Bosniak side have a different (in this case ‘worse’) fashion sense. When Lejla asked her to clarify what she meant, the shop assistant explained that she did not mean to be offensive, but she simply meant to say that clothes sold on the Bosniak side are often outdated and of bad quality, as they lack a proper modern mall in which the newest fashion would be promoted. ‘I felt discriminated at that point. But I am glad she met a person from our side that likes linen, as that might have taught her a lesson not to be so narrow-minded anymore’, she added.

The nature of the spaces of everyday encounters and the practices associated with them are important for the quality and the type of encounters in the divided city. In all the ‘walk-alongs’ with Maja and Lejla one could notice that once they crossed the border, they did not stop anywhere on the way to the mall. We passed many places on the way that have been loaded with political meaning since the war. We had to cross the street that is dividing the Bosniak-dominated from the Croat-dominated parts of Mostar (the *bulevar* to locals) every time we went to the mall Rondo. On our ‘walk-alongs’ we passed by several representative places – like the many new post-war monuments or the ‘Central Zone’, an area between the two sides of the city where ethnic and religious symbols and infrastructure of any kind are forbidden – to which they did not show any particular attachment. This once again points to the understanding that while malls can indeed be seen as materialisations of the globalised economy and places of exclusion, for these city dwellers they are spaces of encounters with the city dwellers from ‘the other side’, which may lead to the formation of new relations in the divided city.

### **When Differences Meet at the Mall**

Shopping malls tend to be treated as spaces of the urban middle classes and elites, spaces which metaphorically and literally embody growing tendencies of urban divisions and exclusions. Drawing on examples of how marginalised urban dwellers use shopping malls in Johannesburg and Mostar, this article questions and modifies this view, emphasising that the complex nature of malls and the playful, diverse practices of mall users give us the opportunity to reflect on the meanings of convivial social encounters in divided cities in which centre-margins relations potentially become reworked.

This paper has shown that the physical nature of these spaces of everyday encounters is important for the quality and the type of encounters. In both Mostar and Johannesburg, the malls studied are located at a distance from the places of residence of township dwellers and Bosniaks respectively, yet both groups were willing to cross the spatial and social boundaries to get to the malls. In Johannesburg, the public transport between the township and the Greenstone mall is scarce and expensive, which makes it difficult to frequent it, yet this does not keep township dwellers away. In Mostar, Bosniak mall goers have to cross Croat-dominated parts of the city which they do not feel comfortable in, yet the attraction of the mall is big enough that they nevertheless walk through it. At the mall, the hallways serve as a physical stage where new forms of competition and belonging become enacted based on fashion and consumption decisions overriding and replacing historical categories of racial, ethnic, religious and or class divisions. Shopping solidarity can emerge among women looking for bargains, based on instances of perceived commonality around caring for others and saving money. Carefully selecting clothes and hair styles and putting them on stage at the mall and elsewhere leads to the constitution of new relational identities related to notions like 'cool' and 'looking good'. Shopping at the mall hence not only constitutes social relations, values and social differences like gender, class and ethnicity (Miller 1998), but also leads to the formation of new differentiations. In order to look 'cool', one doesn't need to be wealthy, but it demands creativity and sense of style, which enables mall goers to reconstitute centre-margins relations in new ways. Malls provide a setting for particular kinds of encounters: ephemeral encounters of seeing and being seen by strangers, sometimes enriched by short instances of verbal exchanges among strangers like fellow shoppers and shop clerks. Mall users link these physical encounters with larger imaginations of the city and the society at large.

This study has pointed at the ways in which the practices of malling in the spaces of the 'others' are constructed and negotiated by the city dwellers – for them going to the mall is a way of re-constituting oneself in new ways. By being at the place of the 'other' in unspectacular ways, these city dwellers redefine boundaries that are deeply embedded in the political and social context of these cities marked by divisions: the mall of the 'others' is the place where Leija can find her perfect linnen dress but also rebel against the ethnically divided city and for Nnana it is the dreamlike world where she can escape from her everyday problems but also meet white people that shop for very cheap clothes. What is more, these ethnographies show that city dwellers are not passive recipients of a marginalised position in the spaces of the 'others', but they are able to appropriate these spaces to their needs. In their

research on migrants' senses of belonging in Manchester, Savage et al (2005) showed that places are not characterised by tensions between insiders and outsiders, but rather that a place is defined by those who 'electively belong' to a specific residential location which they can make congruent with their lives (2005, 203). In a similar way, Nnana, Basani, Maja and Lejla remind us of the ways people on the urban margins actively redefine and renegotiate their positions in order to meet their needs. Shopping malls in Johannesburg and Mostar provide a physical and social setting where new ways of belonging become enacted, leading to reconfigurations of center-margins relations.

This article has also shown that the focus on the micro-level of everyday encounters in cities divided along ethnic, racial or class lines is productive for understanding the complexity of everyday lives in such settings. Research on contested cities is often preoccupied with structural inequality and segregation on a large scale, yet overlook the everyday settings in which mixing occurs. A focus on the everyday encounters shows us that the people in these cities – much like in any other city – have 'ordinary' lives that are often not congruent to the 'big' arguments about identity and belonging (see also the argument by Lane in this special issue). Spaces of encounter like shopping malls hence carry the promise of transformation, as they constitute spaces where what appears as rigid urban boundaries becomes reworked by urban dwellers' agency.

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