

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Breaking Down Walls: New Solutions for More Effective Urban Crime Prevention in South African Cities

Monique Marks* and Chris Overall†

In the late apartheid period South African suburbs began to change dramatically in both their appearance and design. Essentially, housing was designed with the aim of keeping intruders out. This included constructing increasingly high walls, implementing electrified fences and laser beams. Alongside these 'investments' and design innovations came the massive growth of the private security industry. A new mentality emerged which focused on the fortification of home and office space. Initially, this was strongly supported and bolstered by the private security industry that had vested interests in the rush to monitor space and strengthen security. Whether or not high walls and electrified fences do indeed reduce experiences of crime victimisation for individual home owners and residents is debatable. The private security industry and the police now suggest that walls might not provide the security home owners believe they do. This research investigates whether walls, electric fences and beams, among other tools, succeed in reducing fear of crime and victimisation, from the perspective of those who police, i.e., public and private security organisations. The aim is to establish whether policing agents view walls as an aid or hindrance to policing and security management. The 'praxis' goal of this research is, through public engagement, to shift paradigms about walls and security and to bring to the fore the importance of natural surveillance and neighbourly contact in making urban spaces safer.

Introduction

Felson and Clarke (2010) make the important point that criminologists have paid little attention to the routine precautions of ordinary people in preventing crime. They suggest two reasons for this: firstly, it is a study of the mundane and secondly, there

is distaste for the preoccupation of protecting possessions. Furthermore, routine, everyday practices have been neglected due to the emphasis on understanding offenders, rather than focusing on the situations in which offences occur. However, in recent years there has been growing interest in routine activity theory, the rational choice perspective and crime prevention through environmental design. This article is fundamentally concerned with ordinary people in their everyday spaces, the choices they make and the realities of environmental

* Urban Futures Centre, Durban University of Technology, South Africa
moniquem@dut.ac.za

† Durban Metropolitan Police, South Africa
chris.overall@durban.gov.za

design and its impact on crime and fear of crime. The focus of this article is suburban dwellers in Durban, the third largest city in South Africa.

Foreigners entering the suburbs of South Africa's major cities post-apartheid are often struck by the high walls and the wide range of security devices inside and outside houses that characterise these suburban spaces. Likewise, when South Africans visit cities abroad they are struck, and relieved to be in spaces that are free of high walls, electric fencing and burglar bars. Most South Africans returning from 'unwalled' cities comment on the freedom, security and community in those places. However, at home, high walls and other hard-targeting 'crime prevention' devices are viewed as non-negotiable in creating a sense of safety in a country that many view as plagued by crime (Altbeker 2007; Leggett 2003; Singh 2008; Samara 2010). According to Lemanski (2004), public concern with crime has grown exponentially since 1994. Interestingly, in 1994 public opinion polls indicated very low levels of concern with crime. By 1997, this concern had increased from six per cent to 58 per cent. While crime statistics do indicate a dramatic increase in crime post-1994, the increase in fear of crime is not proportionate to the increase in crime rates (Gordon 1998).

We are presented with a strange dissonance: South Africans long for open living spaces yet they feel compelled to fortify their own homes. This dissonance in thinking about home and abroad is further compounded by the fact that most suburban South Africans who are middle-aged or older grew up in suburbs that were not walled. Private security companies did not patrol the neighbourhoods of their youth, and alarms and other security devices were very uncommon. Yet, since the dying days of apartheid, walls have become an intrinsic part of suburban life. In the post-apartheid period there was a rush, particularly in affluent suburbs, to construct walls and create gated communities (Steinberg 2008). In her book, *Policing and Crime Control in Post-Apartheid South*

Africa Singh (2008) vividly describes how suburbs became walled spaces that aimed not only to prevent criminals from entering properties, but also to punish them. This is achieved by attaching sharp pieces of glass and metal to the top of the walls so that those who attempt to get over them are seriously harmed. Singh (2008) and Vahed (2013) note that, at least in the early years of post-apartheid, this desire for walls was promoted by policing agents, most notably private security companies.

Whether or not high walls and electrified fences actually reduce crime victimisation and targeting is debatable and does not depend on one factor alone. As this article hopes to demonstrate, high walls and fortification may have the opposite effect on security, contrary to the rationale for constructing them. Even the private security industry – once adamant that walls and the technological devices that could be attached to them would be excellent deterrents and barriers – seems to now be suggesting that high walls create insecurity. A new, marginal discourse is emerging that suggests visibility is of the utmost importance in crime prevention, in tandem with neighbourly interactions. The public police also seem to be uncertain about the value that fortification adds to making private spaces safer. Yet fortification in the suburbs that most visibly surfaced in the transition period continues unabated. Houses without walls are viewed as vulnerable, although evidence (and experience) may indicate the contrary. South African suburb dwellers seem to be hardwired into the habit of building walls, and there appears to be little space to deliberate the possibility of tearing down their walls.

In this article we investigate the commonly-held (and arguably logical) view that walls, electric fences, spikes, and CCTV cameras reduce victimisation. We also examine the possibility that walls create additional security problems by forming barriers to those expected to provide security services and by impeding natural surveillance. We conducted this research primarily from the

viewpoint of those who are responsible for policing, both the public and private police.

The aim of this article is not simply to lay bare some of the commonly-held myths about how to create safer private spaces. We also hope that it will serve as a platform for new deliberations, debates and even innovations in secure housing design. It is important to note that this article focuses on individual free standing houses, and is not a study of gated communities.

Doing the Research

Both researchers have been involved in policing research and practice for many years. Chris Overall is currently based in the Safer Cities Department of the Durban Municipality. Prior to this he worked as a civilian adviser for both the Durban Metropolitan Police and the South African Police Service (SAPS). Monique Marks is a criminologist who has conducted research on security management for many years. She has also done extensive ethnographic work with the police. Both authors were interested in moving beyond the seemingly logical view that high walls prevent and deter crime. To accomplish this, and to engage in a paradigm shift process amongst suburb dwellers, they decided to explore how those who police the suburbs (both private and public security providers) feel about the walls. These perspectives result from their practical experience of policing the suburbs and the incident reports that they were able to provide for analysis.

We decided to compare two very different suburbs. The first, Umbilo, is a working, lower middle class suburb. While some houses in Umbilo have high walls, most have low fences or walls and some even have no boundary fences at all. Umbilo has long been seen as a 'bad area' and is referred to by many who live in Durban as 'Scumbilo'. The second suburb is Westville, an affluent suburb marked by high walls and significant investment in securitisation. In both of these suburbs we identified the local police station responsible and the private security company that has the most 'buy-in' from

residents. We forged a partnership with the SAPS at both the Umbilo and Westville police stations and with the private security companies that are most present in these suburbs, i.e., Blue Security (Umbilo) and ADT Security (Westville).

The research was conducted through a series of interviews with key actors in each of these organisations. More informal group discussions were held with members of the private security companies. Interviews were also held with the crime prevention, community liaison, and crime analysis leaders at each of the police stations. In addition, we joined SAPS members and both private security companies on patrols in both suburbs. Wearing bullet proof vests and having signed indemnity forms, we joined day and night patrols. These patrols allowed us to see which houses were being targeted and to chat to the relevant officers about their perspectives on house design and security. During these patrols both police and private security officers would point out houses that they felt were vulnerable to crime, especially violent crime, as well as which were easier or more difficult to police. While we were permitted to travel in Blue Security's patrol vehicles, ADT company policy prohibited us from doing so. As a result, when researching private policing in Westville, we followed the ADT vehicle with the consent of the cluster manager. Conversations were held with patrol officers before, during and after the shifts. The ride-alongs, interviews and informal conversations were conducted between February and June 2014.

There was great excitement when we explained the purpose of this research to individuals at the policing agencies. Genuine interest was expressed in the research and the dissemination of the results. The private security companies in particular, immediately committed to being partners in this research and action enterprise. This response far exceeded our expectations. The freshness of the research and its forward-thinking approach were viewed as much needed. Blue Security in particular, was keen to discuss

what new technologies and practices could be devised if walls were to be pulled down. This was not what we had expected; prior to engaging in the research process, we had feared that private security income generated through technology was heavily dependent on the existence of walls.

Public and private police representatives were equally keen to see their clients think differently about how to secure themselves and their property. Company directors and station commissioners alike acted as facilitators, rather than as gate keepers, and officers on patrol were eager to have company 'on the job' and to share their expert, bottom-up knowledge.

The Tenuous Link between Walls and Home Security

Walls as a means of defence for the wealthy date back to the Middle Ages when 'inhabitants in cities were protected from outside danger by walls' (Midveit 2005: 11). However, there have been many points in history since then when walls have been 'broken down' and cities have become places of interaction and gathering. Whether or not high walls as design structures actually dispel crime, particularly in the contemporary era, is debatable. Regardless of the debate and serious interrogation of the value and effectiveness of walls, wealthy suburb dwellers in a number of cities across the world have subscribed to the idea that walls act as a barrier to crime and insecurity and as a means of keeping others out (Merry 1993; Low 1997). Caldeira describes Sao Paulo as 'a city of walls' (1996: 87) and Mike Davis graphically portrays the fortified wealthy suburbs of Los Angeles in recent decades:

The city bristles with malice. The carefully manicured lawns of the Westside sprout ominous little signs threatening "ARMED RESPONSE!" Wealthier neighbourhoods in the canyons and hillsides cower behind walls guarded by gun-toting private police and

state-of-the-art electronic surveillance systems...Welcome to post-liberal Los Angeles where the defence of luxury has given birth to an arsenal of security systems and an obsession with policing the social boundaries through architecture (1990: 154).

By the 1990s, walls in the wealthy suburbs of Los Angeles were getting higher, and those behind the walls had the added protection of private security intervention (Davis 1990). The logic behind this technology appears to be that target-strengthening through building high, solid walls makes (private) property physically harder to break into, and may also raise the actual and perceived risk of detection by neighbours or police due to the increased noise created in attempting to break in. This landscape of suburban walls and private security patrols is legitimated by a discourse of fear of crime and violence. Urban fear has resulted in physical design structures intended to exclude. This discourse on urban fear supports suburban residents' claims that they need to live behind gates and walls because of the danger posed by unsavoury strangers that prowl their perimeters (Low 1997). The effectiveness of walls in keeping strangers out is supported by the surveillance capacity and techniques of policing agents.

The identity of the 'stranger' is contextually determined, but almost always with a race, ethnic and/or class bias (Fainstein 2001). In many instances, the shift towards using high walls as defence emerges in periods of major transition, both political and economic (Low 1997). Residential apartheid, created by prejudice and socioeconomic inequality, is reinforced by design formulas, policing (private and public) technologies (Low 1997) and media hype about urban crime (Flusty 1997). Davis argues that this quest for exclusion has created a 'dystopia vision' (1990: 155) where the obsession with safety obscures any other possible solutions. High walls, solid gates and other excluding technologies produce

a landscape that encodes class relations and residential segregation along a number of lines including race, class, ethnicity and even gender (Low 1997).

In the South African case, this dystopia has created a reality far different from the image of a non-racial, desegregated and publicly engaged society. The architecture of South African suburban life provides, as Bickford puts it, 'a hostile environment for the development of democratic imagination and participation' (2000: 356). This echoes the view of urban ethnographers and scholars who are part of the Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) movement. Jane Jacobs (1969), considered the architect of CPTED thinking, was the first to make reference to keeping 'eyes on the street', a concept later developed as 'natural surveillance'. CPTED scholars maintain that walls – concrete and social – serve to increase fear and even the possibility of victimisation. According to them, crime can be reduced or prevented through environmental design that allows for natural surveillance, natural access control and natural territorial reinforcement (Wenzel 2007). The underlying principal of crime prevention for CPTED scholars is that the higher the chances of being seen, the lower the risk of victimisation (Gardner 1995).

Guided to some extent by CPTED scholars, world-renowned (and South African born) criminologist Stanley Cohen (1985) writes that urban environments can be designed to reduce opportunities for crime or fear of crime without resorting to building fortresses. For Cohen, low levels of social integration invoke heightened fear of crime and insecurity. Creating islands of isolation and imposed order can have the exact opposite effect to what is intended by fortification. A number of studies have demonstrated that people who feel isolated are generally more fearful and 'out of control' (Box 1988) within the (sub)urban spaces that they have tried to contain and command. Sennett (1996) explains that urban spaces are by

definition somewhat chaotic and diverse. As soon as we try to artificially control these spaces, our inability to do so reminds us of our vulnerability and incompetence. Put slightly differently, walls create a pacification of everyday life, leading to feelings of defencelessness and uncertainty (Midveit 2005). The physical walls created to 'defend' have the unintended consequence of leaving residents defenceless, with low levels of engagement with those around them and minimal natural surveillance (Felson and Clarke 2010). Vilalta's (2012) study of Mexico City notes that once criminals enter a closed estate or building, the opportunity to commit crime is increased. He adds that home security systems such as walls, reinforced windows and burglar bars are 'expensive and inefficient', and have little impact on residents' fear of crime.

In direct contrast to the situation in South Africa, the United States and Brazil, policy makers and planners in countries like Denmark have made the conscious decision to make city spaces, including suburbs, as open and mixed as possible. Urban design in these forward-thinking countries is based on the idea that one needs to plan spaces so that local people mix with strangers and outcasts, and ordinary behaviour acts to 'drown the not-so ordinary behaviour' (Midveit 2005). How different this is to the South African case where, post-apartheid, there has been increasing fortification of mostly affluent homes. However, fortification is progressively spreading to the residential spaces of the wider social spectrum. An 'architecture of fear' (Lemanski 2004: 101) has captured the suburban urban landscape, justified as a defensible response to crime and insecurity. Perhaps to be expected, according to Lamanski (2004), surveys indicate that despite 'excessive fortification' fear of crime has increased. Isolation has led to increasing fear of the 'other' which in turn has led to further fortification. Lemanski argues that fortification strategies, particularly erecting high walls, have had the iniquitous effect of:

...leaving both public and private spaces devoid of Jacob's natural surveillance (and thereby less safe), and making use of a perverted form of Newman's "defensible space" to facilitate tribal territorialism that serves to increase fear and deepen segregation (2004: 107).

Similarly, in heavily walled suburban spaces in both Brazil and the USA, there exist seemingly unbreakable cycles of isolation, disassociation and mistrust (Davis 1990; Caldeira 1996). In this environment, vulnerability is augmented, while resilience is trampled upon. Attempts to dispel private spaces of fear and uncertainty are not only impossible, but represent a project with perilous consequences for those on either side of the wall/gate (Bickford 2000).

In the following empirical section of the article we demonstrate how fortified homes create a host of quandaries for policing agents.

The Practitioner View of Fortification and Security Mobilisation

There is an assumption in some of the literature on the fortification of suburbs that the police and private security industry have directly contributed to this state of affairs. While there may be some truth in this, we would like to make two important points. Firstly, there has been very little, if any, attempt by urban scholars or even criminologists to understand suburban design from the perspective of the police. This is very odd, given how central the police could, and perhaps should be, in the design of safety in suburban life. Secondly, as is the case with any social grouping, the views of policing agents change as a result of daily experience. It is important to map these changes in both mentality and in technology amongst powerful social actors, such as policing agents.

For the most part we were pleasantly surprised by our engagement with the public and private policing agents we met in the

course of our research. We were surprised to find that their ideas were very similar to those of scholars who promote a more humane, open and congenial city space. Furthermore, advances in policing technology, particularly in the private security industry, have the potential to create secure spaces that are in sharp contrast to the fortressing of cities. Below we articulate some of the key themes that have emerged from our research thus far.

The Myth of Securitisation

The 'myth of securitisation' was introduced by Sergeant Stephen Clark, Community Liaison Head of SAPS Westville. According to him, the hype surrounding security in South Africa and the rush to buy more and more security devices has created a mythical belief that the more one engages with securitisation technologies, the safer one is. Instead, Clark asserts that creating security is fairly simple. The idea that private security companies together with those who design fortress-like structures can make one's home secure is mythical and therefore creates vulnerability.

Brian Jackson from Blue Security similarly spoke of the 'false sense of security' that South Africans create by fortressing their homes and adding unnecessary layers of defensive materials. Interestingly, Jackson believes that this 'foolish mindset' is probably partly due to the ideas that were once promoted by the security industry itself. However, the public's understanding has not shifted in line with new thinking and security technologies that promote more visible and open spaces. In addition, representatives from both the SAPS and the private security companies spoke about how complacent and negligent home owners are with regard to their own management of security because they believe themselves to be covered by policing services and by a variety of technological innovations. In reality, time is of the essence when a home is broken into. Private and public security officers are well aware that their intervention becomes fairly immaterial if they are not able

to get to the scene and into the home within a few minutes.

If not properly used or activated, security technology (such as beams, passives, and even electric fencing) is rendered useless. As we will see below, high walls, viewed as a strong defence against invasion often have the opposite effect of deterring criminals, despite the rationale for constructing them. Indeed, the majority of houses that we were shown that have been the target of more serious crimes had high walls and solid gates. Having said this, it is important to note that crime victimisation is dependent on a number of variables. These include home occupancy, the nature of lighting and burglar bars, and the extent of social integration and cohesion within a neighbourhood. The location of a house near an open space or a river or derelict building is also important to consider.

Based on the information gathered through our conversations and our ride-alongs, as well as the scant official data available from the police, we found that the relatively 'unwalled' suburb of Umbilo is viewed as far safer than the more heavily walled suburb of Westville. While crime does occur in Umbilo, it is generally petty and opportunistic. Westville has a far greater incidence of organised and serious crime. While it is true that 'crime moves', the current situation in Umbilo provides a sharp contradiction to the generally held view that this working class, chaotic and diverse suburb of Umbilo is hard hit by crime.

The Importance of Social Integration, Neighbourliness and Natural Surveillance

While private security representatives did discuss the importance of security technology such as beams, passives and even CCTV in optimising home security, they placed considerable emphasis on natural surveillance and neighbourliness. For Martin Kriel, ADT Managing Director of the East Coast Region, the most important way to create personal

and communal security is to 'know your neighbours', and build a sense of local community. Local people, he asserted, need to take control of their own security. Nothing, not even technology, can replace the value of people looking after one another and intervening immediately if a security threat arises. However, he clearly articulated that citizen groupings need to be regulated in order to avoid over-zealous responses.

During a ride-along in the Umbilo area, Lieutenant Colonel Correa from SAPS Umbilo said the following:

The first thing I did when I moved into my house in Glenwood is broke down the existing wall. I simply put up a transparent fence. The second thing I did is I went around getting to know my neighbours. I am a policeman, and I know what counts. Visibility, a good network of neighbours, and natural surveillance. Nothing can replace the importance of people in your neighbourhood. Of course I have a dog and burglar bars, but what is most important is knowing the people around me, being friendly, and looking out for each other.

Correa took us to see his house which has nothing more than a palisade fence as a boundary. He chatted to people on the street as we were standing next to his house, demonstrating his sense of connectedness to the people in his immediate suburban space.

Blue Security Senior Technical Advisor, Sunil Ramdayal believes that South Africans are overly concerned with the notion of privacy at all costs. He feels that this is unfortunate and maintains that if we South Africans were serious about safety, we would know that safety comes from being deeply involved and embedded in one another's lives, particularly those of our neighbours. He stated that Westville suburban dwellers are more concerned with being able to wear bikinis at home without being seen than



Figure 1: Lieutenant Colonel Correa's house.

with making their houses safer through visibility. He added that isolation is the greatest threat to safety and the biggest cause of fear of crime.

This sentiment resonates deeply with Lieutenant Colonel Correa's views and his commitment to creating a living space where visibility is the primary design principle with regard to home boundaries. Correa's house (**Figure 1**) demonstrates an openness to the community that surrounds him, rather than a need to close off and fortify. His house provides a powerful image, particularly given that he is a high ranking police officer in the SAPS, willing to showcase his house as an example of good safety design. Natural surveillance is the key to home security management for Correa. Neither walls nor natural vegetation block the view of his house. The open view of his house also allows him to see and engage with people and activities on his street, and for people to see that his house is a place of 'people flow'. For Correa, the concept of people flow acts as a deterrent to those who want to invade without disruption or who target the more vulnerable, i.e., women, the elderly and children.

Below are some photos of the different types of housing boundaries and their stories

that we discovered on our outings with the private and public police.

This house (**Figure 2**) fascinated us because it has no physical boundary. On one of our ride-alongs we decided to talk to the residents of this house in Umbilo. We were able to walk from the street to the front gate – a very uncommon occurrence in South African suburban spaces. A woman opened the door, unsurprised and unperturbed by the strangers at her door. We asked if we could chat for a bit about her home and about safety issues, and she readily spoke with us. She informed us that she has no intention of building a wall, and has never wanted to. She has lived in this house for 17 years and her husband for more than 30 years. In all this time, they have not experienced any crime other than the robbery of a cell phone. She felt strongly that her home was part of the street. One of the authors lives in Umbilo and has noted that in the evenings and on weekends there are always people socialising on the outside balcony of the house. In this woman's eyes, the visible flow of space and people (which is her family's life) seems to have served as a deterrent to crime, more powerful than any physical boundary. This house is linked to one of the private security company's



Figure 2: Unwallied house in Umbilo.

alert and patrol systems. The private security officer from this company claims that he does not recall being called to this particular house for any crime incident.

While not all houses in Umbilo are as open as the one depicted in **Figure 2**, most have boundaries that allow for visibility. The reasons for this are multiple: lack of funds to create fortifications, a history of connectedness with neighbours, and a vibrant daily street life with people walking from place to place and children playing in the roads. In Westville, the streets are quieter, the residents are more affluent, and the walls are higher.

We did not speak with the residents of this house (**Figure 3**), but we chose to photograph it in order to demonstrate typical boundary structures found in the most affluent sections of Westville. We also photographed this house because, according to a SAPS officer, it represents a conundrum. As the photograph shows, there is a complete absence of opportunities for natural surveillance both from the outside and the inside. The boundary suggests a need to conceal both life and property, and represents a

disengagement from the life (minimal as it may be in this suburb) of the street.

Walls as a Policing Problem

According to both private security companies and the two SAPS station officers, solid, high walls are viewed as an obstacle to policing. Walls prevent patrolling officers from knowing what is happening inside a property, thus detracting from the value of patrols as a form of crime prevention and quick response. Walls can also become a defence for criminals as walls provide them with the freedom to conduct their activities without being seen from the street. In addition, according to private security respondents, once an intruder has accessed the property, the existence of the wall creates a sense of entrapment for those in the home or the yard. The result is a delayed response in alerting either the relevant private security company or the police.

According to Chris Naidoo, ADT Area Manager for Armed Response in the Westville area:

Walls create a real problem for private police patrol officers since we are not



Figure 3: A walled house in Westville.

allowed to jump over walls if ADT is alerted by a private client. Walls are also a problem because they prevent you from seeing what is happening outside your property when you are leaving it and even when you are inside your own property at home. Hijackers could be waiting outside for you without you knowing. The other problem is that high walls attract attention from the point of view that the high walls are protecting something valuable. I would say in general that high, solid walls are not only a problem, they are a waste of time and put the homeowner at risk. High walls restrict access to property for the reaction officer and in the case of being called out patrol officers can only do a perimeter check. This is frustrating for the patrol officer as he cannot access the property and he is supposed to give assistance. This is not only the case for when we are called out for a supposed invasion, but also, for example, if a client has a heart attack and collapses and cannot open the gate, and then he dies. We have had such instances.

On our patrol ride-along with Blue Security Patrol Manger, Lieutenant Syd, we were shown a number of heavily walled houses that had been targeted for more serious crimes, such as car hijacking or robbery. When clients do not make access arrangements with private security companies, patrol officers are often left immobilised in front of the wall, either out of fear or because company policy does not allow them to 'jump walls'. According to Lieutenant Syd, the houses that are most targeted, particularly by more organised criminals, are those with high walls. His opinion was reinforced by Sunil Ramdayal, the Technical Manager of ADT Security, who stated that 'serious criminals will always look for ways to be hidden from sight. High walls provide this and my sense is that it is behind high walls that more serious crimes take place'. Unfortunately, we were unable to verify Syd and Ramdayal's observations through official police statistics or incident reports because the release of such information is prohibited by senior police management.

On 12 June 2014, we were at the Westville Police Station when a report was received of an armed robbery at a house in Westville. A family had been held at gun point. In

the midst of the activity taking place in the police station we managed to chat briefly to the Acting Station Commissioner, Lieutenant Colonel Tommy Stewart, about this event. We asked him if the house was by any chance walled. He replied that it was and that high, walled houses give the police the 'biggest headache'. While these are not the only houses targeted, according to him they are targeted as much or even more than houses with open fencing, low walls or no walls. The added problem presented by walled houses is that police can neither see what is going on during patrols nor gain access when an incident is reported. This police view resonates with a survey conducted in the late 1990s of more than 30 station commissioners in the wider Johannesburg area. All 30 believed that walls made the fight against crime more difficult (Rauch 1998).

Walls as a Threat to Occupational Health and Safety

Little, if any thought, is given to the health and occupational safety risks that fortified houses create for policing agents. Indeed, we, the authors, had never given any thought to this prior to researching this topic. Yet walls and other forms of solid boundaries create real problems for patrol officers. Not only is jumping a high wall physically dangerous in itself, but there is also the possibility for patrol officers to be caught unawares by home intruders who are hiding behind walls. Patrol officers from the private security companies are often the first respondents to invasion alerts and are therefore easy targets, particularly when they enter an impenetrable and concealed space. Walls create much anxiety and fear in the minds of policing agents. According to Lieutenant Syd of Blue Security, a number of his patrol officers had been killed after being caught unawares by serious offenders hiding behind walls. Blue Security patrollers and SAPS officers have also broken limbs by jumping over walls in the hurry to gain access despite the high walls and locked gates.

Home owners and buyers of private security (especially patrol services) are often unaware that the larger and more established private security companies forbid their patrol officers to jump over walls, precisely because of the health and safety risk. Martin Kriel, ADT Managing Director informed us that ADT South Africa is bound to a policy, strictly enforced by their American shareholder, Tyco, that prohibits its patrol officers from jumping over walls because of the danger this poses. Kriel discussed how walls have led the company to invest considerable amounts of money in new methods of gaining access to impenetrable properties. He believes that this is a complete waste of resources, particularly because new technologies have made walls somewhat defunct.

An Image of the 'Ideal' Home

Policing agents are well aware that signifiers of wealth generate risk on their own. While they do not talk of inequality as a problem, they are certainly aware that opulent and secured homes indicate the presence of wealth and valuables. By inference, wealth creates vulnerability. Interestingly, the senior management of public and private police organisations that we interviewed all opted to live in 'regular', middle-income areas. They believe that these areas are less targeted than wealthier areas and that there is a greater sense of community. Martin Kriel chooses to live in Queensburgh, considered to be a low-middle income area rather than a high end suburb which he could well afford. Lieutenant Colonel Corea from Umbilo SAPS has similarly opted to live in a suburb called Lower Glenwood. This area is characterised by houses in very close proximity to each other and an active, integrated and diverse community. Both Kriel and Corea were adamant that they would not live in more affluent areas such as Westville or Durban North.

We asked our respondents from SAPS and the private security companies to describe what they consider to be an 'ideal safe home'. We were intrigued by some of the unexpected and remarkably sensible design

principles they discussed. With the exception of one officer from ADT, all the respondents were adamant that walls were undesirable. Fences or barriers were deemed necessary, but mostly to keep pets and children within bounds. These boundaries should, ideally, allow people to see in and those inside their homes to see out onto the street, which is in many ways a continuation of their homes. There should be a limited number of access points to a home to easily determine where an intruder might enter. Walls formed from shrubs and bushes rather than concrete, should be eliminated as they also limit visibility. Compact, simple, single story houses were viewed as desirable as they are easier for police to access and make hiding more difficult for possible intruders. Houses should also be either at street level or above street level, but never below. Good lighting was also regarded as essential for viewing both what is happening inside and around your home, and also as a deterrent to criminals who do not want to be seen.

One of the Regional Managers at Blue Security, Brian Jackson said the following when he was asked to consider what an ideal house would look like:

Walls look terrible. I was in the building industry for many years. You can never make walls look nice. At the end of the day it is only there to keep people out, and why do we want to do that? That doesn't seem to make sense because we don't live in an island. I broke down the wall around my father's home and I felt immediate freedom. Crime will still be there, it always will, but you will feel you are part of the community. Freedom is the most important thing in life. Having a city without walls would make our city look so much more beautiful and it would create much more linkages between people. It would mean that your relationship with people becomes more friendly

and open, which has to be a good thing. I'd like to see no high walls. I would love to walk through my town. I think that would be beautiful. We need to have openness. There need to be active public spaces with children on the road. At ten at night women should be walking on the streets without worrying about a risk element because they can see that there are other people out and about. We need to have well looked after parks with equipment. I would love to see people using the public space. The community needs to own their space. But people are too scared. We need to get some people to take the risk. And let's go back to being simple. What does it prove to have a huge house and a huge yard and never feel really at home?

In hearing these various responses, we were alerted to the importance of the policing voice in developing home design principals. As Steve Wimborne, Head of Special Projects at Blue Security stated, 'Those of us in the business of policing and security know more about how design can be used to build in safety than architects and builders'. Embedded in the practitioner and expert knowledge of policing agents is a wealth of urban planning ideas which we believe are too rarely applied. It is worth noting that although the majority of SAPS officers and private police respondents who we interacted with during this research project are unlikely to have studied, or even heard of CPTED, they almost intuitively spoke the language of CPTED, although admittedly with a heightened sense of and emphasis on technological innovations and the use of burglar bars in defending private property. Overwhelmingly, though, there was a sensibility that natural surveillance and visibility were key to crime prevention in the suburbs. The fortification of the suburbs was viewed as a policing nightmare and a criminal's paradise.

The Role of Technology in Opening up the Built Environment

Property crime such as burglary is typically one of subterfuge where the offender seeks to enter a property unseen and unhindered in order to commit the offence. The degree of visibility of a property is an important consideration and signal for someone intending to commit a break-in or burglary (Van Zyl et al 2003). Research of offenders has shown that burglars may avoid targets that have high levels of natural surveillance due to the increased risk of intervention, apprehension and/or prosecution (Couzenz 2008). Conversely, homes with low levels of visibility from neighbours and passers-by (including policing patrols) are arguably more vulnerable to burglary (Homel et al 2013).

Much discussion can be found in criminological research on the influence that natural surveillance or visibility has on burglar decision-making and target selection. However, little attention is given to the role of technology in quantifying the level of visibility or surveillance that each property is afforded in terms of its own layout and design. Feedback from ADT, Blue Security and SAPS members on the importance of visibility in policing neighbourhoods prompted the decision to test whether the application of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and other associated software (such as Microstation, Gopal Mapper and ArcView vers.9.3.1) could play a role in quantifying just how open or closed a neighbourhood is. Private security companies indicated interest in this. Contrary to what many believe logical for these companies, technology can be used to reduce the construction of walls and other solid, physical boundaries. The discussions on cities without walls stimulated interest among the private security industry personnel with whom we engaged about the development of technology to 'fit' spaces that are not walled. Different from any other form of 'security technology', the GIS approach was viewed as a means to gain empirical

evidence free from any policing and security culture bias or stereotypes.

We decided to select a road in Umbilo that is by and large not walled. A segment of Fleming Johnston Road was chosen and viewpoints were plotted every ten metres at a view height of 1.8 metres. This method was used to simulate what might practically be seen from a pedestrian/neighbour perspective with each view point placed every ten metres and giving an average of two 'looks' at a property. Observations for each view point were then calculated based on a 360 degree sweep angle with the analysis being run twice for each viewpoint (Swart 2014).

In the first algorithm run demonstrated in **Figure 4**, all obstacles to visibility were considered such as solid walls, hedges, buildings and roofs, with no distinctions made. In the second image below (**Figure 5**) which is the uninterrupted line of sight, we provide a picture of what an observer would see if standing in the centre of Fleming Johnston Road looking at the various properties.

From this we can establish that only ten of the 24 properties (42 per cent) in the target segment had clear visibility (an uninterrupted line of sight) from the road. This was compromised by the presence of mainly shrubs, foliage, and fences.

The second algorithm (**Figure 6**) run on the viewpoints ignores features such as shrubs, hedges, foliage, palisade and wire fences. It allows for the calculation of areas of partial visibility.

This second analysis indicates that, when taking into account the area calculated as partial visibility combined with clear visibility, visibility grew to 71 per cent. Only seven of the 24 properties (29 per cent) were not visible at all from the viewpoints. This is dramatically different from roads in the more affluent area of Westville where even partial visibility is lacking.

By using GIS, policing agents would be able to calculate visibility. It can also track the kinds of changes that the neighbourhood would need to make to increase visibility.



Figure 4: Test Area : Umbilo, segment of Fleming Johnstone Rd.

This in turn would impact directly on the advice that policing agencies (public and private) could provide to suburban dwellers, and on the way in which individual houses and neighbourhoods are designed.

The idea to create more visibility as a way of preventing crime and creating safer spaces is one that is known to scholars and makes sense to policing agents. Yet home owners have a different mentality, particularly those in wealthier suburbs. Through technological innovation and simple dialogue, policing

agents could play a very important role in shifting paradigms about home design for safety enhancement. For the pro-fortification mentality to shift, alternatives need to be presented to suburb dwellers. These alternatives must be accompanied by evidence that visibility and neighbourliness are important factors in reducing home victimisation, particularly with regard to more violent and organised crime. Government should also play a role in changing sensibilities as to how urban spaces are designed and how they will



Figure 5: Results of test for complete visibility, segment of Fleming Johnstone Rd.

be made more operationally manageable by police agents.

One of the first steps in achieving this suburban shift in viewpoint would be to illustrate, with the assistance of GIS systems, the extent to which neighbourhoods are visually open or closed, and the impact that this has on the effectiveness of policing and the provision of services by security companies. The ability to quantify visibility in neighbourhoods would allow security companies, municipalities and the SAPS to

assess ‘at risk’ properties from a visibility perspective and develop crime reduction interventions based on empirical processes. The development of Risk Terrain Models for burglary, including the degree of neighbourhood visibility as a burglary risk factor, is one such example.

The capacity to calculate open space/visibility would further allow the concept of visibility as a natural security feature to be introduced as a crime prevention ‘must have’ through community education/crime



Figure 6: Combined results for partial and complete visibility, segment of Fleming Johnstone Rd.

reduction programmes. An example of this approach that currently exists, albeit in a completely different context, is ‘Operation Bumblebee’, a community education programme on burglary reduction launched by the London Metropolitan Police Service. This initiative clearly spells out the virtues of visibility and opening up space, even going so far as to suggest an optimum height of one metre for a boundary fence. Its positive

impact results from the fact that the authoritative voice derives from the policemen themselves.

The ‘de-fortification’ of neighbourhoods not only requires taking down walls, but the creation of efficient and active partnerships between the property owner, police, municipalities and security service providers to create a layer of active protection rather than a passive layer. In essence, there needs

to be a transferral of trust from the passive to the active and a commitment to a more progressive approach towards technological innovation on the part of policing agents. Technology has been massively important in protecting people from harm since before the development of modern criminal justice systems (Felson and Clarke 2010). This will continue to be the case, but the technologies that are used should enhance the effectiveness of the routine precautions taken by ordinary people in their individual daily lives. This presents an interesting challenge to those in the policing industry.

Imagining Forward

At the beginning of this article we indicated that this research was based on an action-oriented approach. The goal of this research is not merely to publish the results. Rather, the aim is for it to form a platform for debate and new design possibilities. In August 2014, a series of discussions was launched, hosted by the Urban Futures Centre at the Durban University of Technology. The ideas and philosophies of all the key partners in the research process were presented to a wide audience. The aim of these forums was to create a space for deliberations about walls and design with regard to enhancing safety and reducing crime-targeting. Representatives from the private and public policing agencies that were part of this research process were to be included in these forums. This is important not only because we are committed to a participatory action research approach, but also because we believe that they are important 'shapers' of safety governance, including (sub)urban design.

During the public forums, photographs were used to portray houses with varying degrees of built-in security, as viewed by those responsible for policing the suburbs. Prior to these public discussions, an architect was contracted to develop drawings of what an ideal safe house would look like, as described by the various private and public police members who engaged in this

research process. The aim of these public forums was two-fold: to shift paradigms on home security strengthening and to encourage innovative ideas when designing safety features. These public meetings were scheduled to begin in September 2014.

There is also a modelling component to this project. The idea is to obtain 'buy-in' from the Architecture and Safer Cities Departments of eThekweni Municipality to test new design principles. This will begin with the identification of a suburban space that is heavily walled and simultaneously subject to high levels of crime victimisation. The municipality will offer to level the walls in a small section of a neighbourhood and replace them with more transparent boundary structures. Should this reduce crime victimisation and fear of crime, the project will be expanded to other places, possibly with the private security companies as experimental partners. Should fear and crime victimisation increase, the municipality will be obliged to cover the costs of rebuilding the walls. The suburbs then become a laboratory for increasing safety in urban settings. During the process, we hope the lives of city dwellers will be improved as physical and social walls are deconstructed.

The level of success that this 'imagining forward' project will have is debatable. The fortification of homes will endure as long as the dominant discourse links safety to walls and forceful security mobilisation. 'Home' is, after all, more than just a space. It is 'a preferred space' that provides 'a fixed point of reference around which the individual may personally structure his or her spatial reality' (Porteous 1976: 37). Fundamental to what 'home' represents is both security and identity. A home is meant to be a haven and a refuge from the 'outside world', as well as a place to be free to express your individuality (Porteous 1976). According to Porteous, 'the security of the home allows personal identity to flower' (1976: 384). The notion of 'home' is fundamentally emotional and personal. So, too, is fear of crime.

The possibility of imagining Durban as a suburb without walls is in many ways dependent on whether new and existing discourse by policing experts is heard and integrated into design and living principles. It is also dependent on whether the various social actors concerned (including eThekweni Municipality) are willing to take the risks required to optimise ordinary people's home security by facilitating and encouraging alternate routine precautions in preventing crime. As Felson and Clarke put it, wise governments should play a key role in moving citizens 'as far away as possible from the ineffective and counterproductive prevention methods toward those that work at minimal cost' (2010: 114). What better way of doing this than through deliberating on, and even planning towards, suburbs without walls as one key (but not exclusive) routine precaution against crime?

References

- Altbeker, A** 2007 *A Country at War with Itself: South Africa's Crisis of Crime*. Cape Town: Jonathan Ball.
- Bickford, S** 2000 Constructing inequality: City spaces and the architecture of citizenship. *Political Theory*, 28(3): 355–376. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0090591700028003003>
- Box, S, Hale, C and Andrews, G** 1988 Explaining fear of crime. *British Journal of Criminology*, 28: 340–356.
- Caldeira, T** 1996 Crime and individual rights: reframing the question of violence in Latin America. In: Jelin, E & E Hershberg (eds) *Constructing Democracy, Human Rights, Citizenship and Society in Latin America*. Colorado: Westview Press. pp. 197–211.
- Cohen, S** 1985 *Visions of Social Control: Crime, Punishment and Classification*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Davis, M** 1990 *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles*. Los Angeles: Verso.
- Fainstein, S** 2001 *The City Builders: Property Development in London and New York, 1998–2000*. Lawrence: University Press of Texas.
- Felson, M and Clarke, RV** 2010 Routine precautions, criminology, and crime prevention. In: H Barlow and S Decker (eds) *Crime and Public Policy: Putting Theory to Work*. 2nd ed. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press. pp. 106–123.
- Flusty, S** (ed) 1997 Building Paranoia. In N. Ellin (ed). *Architecture of Fear*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press. pp. 47–60.
- Gardner, R** 1995 Crime Prevention through Environmental Design. *Security Management Magazine*, April edition.
- Gordon, D** 1998 Crime in the New South Africa. *The Nation*, 267(15): 17–21.
- Homel, R, MacIntyre, S and Wortley, R** 2013 How house burglars decide on targets: a computer based scenario approach. In: B Leclerc & R Wortley (eds) *Cognition and Crime: Offender Decision Making and Script Analysis*. Crime Series: Routledge. pp. 26–48.
- Jacobs, J** 1969 *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. New York: The Modern Library.
- Leggett, T** 2003 The facts behind the figures: crime statistics 2002/3. *South African Crime Quarterly*, 6: 1–5.
- Lemanski, C** 2004 A new apartheid? The special implications of crime in Cape Town, South Africa. *Environment and Urbanisation*, 16(2): 101–111. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/095624780401600201>
- Low, S** 1997 Urban Fear: Building Fortress America. *City and Society, Annual Review*: 52–72.
- Merry, S** 1993 Mending walls and building fences: Constructing the private neighbourhood. *Journal of Legal Pluralism*, 33:71–90. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/07329113.1993.10756443>
- Midtveit, E** 2005 Crime prevention and exclusion: From walls to opera music. *Journal of Scandinavian Studies in Crime and Crime Prevention*, 6: 23–38. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14043850510035137>

- Porteous, J** 1976 Home: The territorial core. *Geographical Review*, 66(4): 383–390. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/213649>
- Rauch, J** 1998 Crime and crime prevention in greater Johannesburg: The views of police station commissioners. Occasional paper, Centre for the Study of Violence: Johannesburg.
- Samara, T** 2010 State security in transition: The war on crime in post-apartheid South Africa. *Journal for the Study of Race, Nation and Culture*, 9(2): 277–312.
- Sennett, R** 1996 *The Uses of Disorder: Personal Identity and City Life*. London: Faber and Faber.
- Singh, A** 2008 *Policing and Crime Control in Post-Apartheid South Africa*. Burlington: Ashgate.
- Steinberg, J** 2008 *Thin Blue: The Unwritten Rules of Policing South Africa*. Cape Town: Jonathan Ball.
- Swart, P** 2014 Visualising visibility of properties from street view when considering property boundaries, Departmental briefing paper, Ethekwini Municipality.
- Vahed, Y** 2013 Fear of crime, social cohesion and home security systems in post-apartheid South Africa: A case study of Ward 33, Durban. Master of Social Science in Community Development, University of KwaZulu-Natal.
- Van Zyl, GS, Wilson, GD and Pretorius, R** 2003 Residential Burglary in South Africa: Why Individual Households Adopt Reactive Strategies. *Acta Criminologica*, 16(3): 107–123.
- Vilalta, C** 2012 Fear of crime and home security systems. *Police Practice and Research: An International Journal*, 13: 4–14. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/15614263.2011.607651>
- Wenzel, R** 2007 CPTED: Interpreting contemporary security practices in the era of homeland security. Master of Arts in Criminology and Criminal Justice, University of Texas at Arlington.

How to cite this article: Marks, M and Overall, C 2015 Breaking Down Walls: New Solutions for More Effective Urban Crime Prevention in South African Cities. *Stability: International Journal of Security & Development*, 4(1): 3, pp.1-19, DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5334/sta.es>

Published: 28 January 2015

Copyright: © 2015 The Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 Unported License (CC-BY 3.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited. See <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/>.

[u] *Stability: International Journal of Security & Development* is a peer-reviewed open access journal published by Ubiquity Press

OPEN ACCESS 