

*“Everything was different then”: “fear of crime” and the “loss of the streets” on the Berea, (Durban) in the new South Africa*

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The worlds that were apartheid South Africa were bounded and divided worlds, reflecting the fears of those who made them. In refining, instituting, regulating and maintaining the system of physical segregation on racial lines that became known as apartheid, its architects acted as the conscious heirs of a lengthy tradition of colonial attempts at segregation: their policies concretised deep-seated and often inchoate yet profoundly culturally-ingrained fears of racial contamination and pollution. The legislative expression of such fears, and the attempts at racial superiority that accompanied them, made manifest equally deep-rooted spectres of social disorder, of violence, both criminal and political, of rebellion against the body of the colonial state and of assault on the private body of the individual. Such concerns were not of course unique to South Africa: they permeated the colonial history of other settler societies such as Australia and the United States, and of extractive colonies such as Malaya or the Congo. In their South African version however, they have had a remarkable longevity. And, South Africa's histories have particular resonances and enduring reflections: “It was apartheid that made South African cities especially interesting.” (832) as Jeremy Seekings has

recently reminded us. The express project of the new South Africa, to construct a non-racial society, cuts across a lengthy history of suspicion, fear, paranoia and distrust, of moral panics and covert resistance, as ordinary people grapple with histories of actual oppression and of perceived danger, and seek ways to reimagine the present.

In the new South Africa of the post-1994 period, political violence of the types that ravaged much of the country during the 1980s and early 1990s reappears only sporadically and on a small scale, while criminal violence has become much more extensive than previously, both in reality and in perception. The roots of this, and the reasons for it, are beyond the scope of this paper, where I focus on the near-city area of the Berea in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal (KZN), and examine local perceptions of crime and criminal violence in order to explore understandings of community, neighbourhood and individual relationships and responsibilities within the four suburbs (Musgrave, Essenwood, Morningside and Windermere) that make up the area. Also beyond the scope of this paper is any attempt to test perceptions of crime on the Berea against the realities of crime, to somehow measure the validity or legitimacy of individual feelings about crime. That is not my intention here. Crime statistics are awkward beasts, particularly in a policing environment such as that of South Africa in which individual reporting units (police units, stations, areas or divisions) may well have differing practices in the recording of crime and its incidents. These internal contradictions have been so marked that they finally led in 1999 to the then-Minister for Safety and Security, Steve Tshwete, placing a moratorium on their public release on the advice of National Police Commissioner, Jackie Selebi (Schonteich). But quite apart from the imprecision of South African crime statistics and the flawed realities they represent, my concern in this paper is with the understandings that local people, long- and short-term residents and workers alike, are constructing about their place, and the interactive relationships between place and people that they perceive and articulate: both the “talking of crime” that Loader, Girling and Sparks have defined in the introduction to their study of Macclesfield in England, and the local narratives of place and notions of community. Here I use

crime as metaphor; a tool through which these narratives can be understood.

In this I am complicit: both participant and observer. I live and teach in Western Australia, my research is in South Africa, I am married to a Durbanite, we have a house on the Berea in which we spend as much time as we can. I hear the talking of crime at dinner parties and across the garden wall, I walk the streets of the area for exercise and for relaxation, I am a discussant and decisionmaker about the types of security precautions my husband and I need to take for our house, our car, ourselves. In positioning myself as a feminist oral historian/ethnographer, I recognise and work within the methodological difficulties and entanglements of the ethnography of everyday experience, and acknowledge both the advantages and limitations of "experience-near" ethnography as a practice (Dolby 127; Geertz 57). I position this too as a set of narrations of a particular corner of the new South Africa, within which the talking of crime and the articulation of notions of community/non-community have become dominant narratives,<sup>1</sup> which link individual and collective memories, public and private understandings, popular and elite articulations, as core, indeed, foundation, stories of the new South Africa.

### **"Hanging around the Berea"<sup>2</sup>**

As we walked across Berea Park just after 5 o'clock on a Sunday morning early in January 2003, a homeless man who was, at the time, regularly sleeping in the park, called out to my husband and I, asking: "Why can't they clean up their own rubbish?" His anger was obvious, but clearly not directed at us. He was busy picking up pieces of rubbish, the remnants of takeaway drinks and

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<sup>1</sup> I am much indebted to the many Berea residents and workers who talked to me for this paper. For a variety of reasons, few wished to be identified, but my gratitude goes to all of them.

<sup>2</sup> A phrase used by a young near-Berea resident, explaining that he spent much of his time in the cafes and clubs of the Berea, and that as a freelance consultant much of his work also was in and around the Berea, as a reason why he had little detailed knowledge of the geography of Durban's CBD, three kilometres away on the coastal flats below the ridge of the Berea.

snacks and meals from the Essenwood Market, a craft market which operates each Saturday morning. The area immediately around where the temporary stalls stand was clean, recently swept, but a little further away the ground was quite extensively littered and it was that which was being voluntarily cleaned up.

The paradoxes inherent in this small conversation were many, beginning with the market itself. Craft, as it is marketed to visitors to KZN, can be divided into “traditional” and “contemporary,” which can be decoded as “Zulu” (beadwork, baskets, domestic goods such as *mqombothi* (beer) pots, etc) and “white” (leatherwork, quilting, ceramics, jewellery, antiques, clothing, etc.) (Tourism KwaZulu-Natal online). Essenwood market has some five or six stalls selling traditional craft while the remainder (in excess of fifty) deal in contemporary goods.<sup>3</sup> Attached to the market, and integral to its social functions, is a roped-off area of tables chairs and umbrellas, and food stalls, selling the ubiquitous Afrikaner specialty sausage snack, the wors roll, and a range of upmarket foods and drinks such as couscous and espresso coffee from a custom-built coffee trailer.

Pervading the market is a strong sense of community: stallholders talk to each other, many browsers are greeted as old friends, and greet each other, both in the stalls area and in the food enclosure. Indeed, despite its location in a public park, enclosure is the dominant note of the market, both geographically in its confinement to a small area of (now) ungrassed territory on the eastern margin of the park, and demographically in its customer and stallholder base. Unlike the large Musgrave Centre, a formal shopping mall a few hundred metres away in the same street, whose visual demographics clearly are substantially representative of the Durban population as a whole, both socioeconomically and racially, the informal Essenwood market continues to rely on an almost exclusively white patronage. There is little sound of Zulu in its precincts.

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<sup>3</sup> Ironically, more than twenty street hawkers now have established themselves on Saturdays in the streets around Berea Park, selling fruit and vegetables as well as local crafts (brooms, beadwork, etc.)

Enclosure is thus both physical and psychological, self-limiting community to a more or less clearly defined group and attempting also to establish a physical perimeter within which the food bought at the market will be consumed. For the homeless man with whom this narrative began, that perimeter had overflowed in a way that he found objectionable, producing litter with which he was not comfortable, and a sense of the boundaries of pollution having been breached. Ironically, he may well have been one of the "seedy looking vagrants [who] crawled out from under the bushes and trees in the park while I was walking around..." described by a "Concerned resident" in a letter to the local *Berea Mail* about a month later (7).

The contradictory expressions of discomfort and disorder in this narrative lay open deeply conflicting notions of space and its uses, here in both racial and class arenas where previously race had been the primary marker for the allocation of space. As Paul Maylam tells us: "... much of the history of Durban in the twentieth century has been about the contesting of space." (26) Of course, that historical contestation was on a different scale, emerging from reactions to the segregation into locations of the mid-19th century, reactions to the massive relocations from Umkumbaan/Cato Manor to the new townships of Umlazi and Kwa Mashu in the 1950s and 1960s, reactions to the similar relocations of people of "Indian" origin from the downtown area, reactions to the pass laws that governed daily movement by everyone who was not classified as "white;" all these were contests for space and indeed for survival on a much grander, and more overtly political, scale than anything now occurring. Nonetheless, I suggest that the hidden struggles on the Berea in the post-1994 period for space to live and work (and for redefinition of what those spaces might comprise), are a reflection, even if pale by comparison, of the lengthy historical contestations that have marked Durban's subterranean histories of reaction and resistance.

**“It's not as bad as Johannesburg”<sup>4</sup>**

Both demographically and geographically, despite its continuing reputation as the upmarket area of Durban within which to live, the Berea is a patchwork, from street children finding shelter wherever they can, to wealthy scions of old Natal families on extensive properties with sweeping views down to the sea. Running along the 150-metre high ridge overlooking the city itself, the area receives the full benefit of cooling sea breezes and so has a more gentle, less humid, micro-climate than that found on the western side of the ridge. The eThekweni City Council's *Management Plan* for the area prepared by Iyer Rothaug describes it as “unique,” “the visual backdrop of the city” which “... represents an important part of the City, forming a gateway into the core city, containing major regional and national movement corridors... home to a large and diverse population.” (2.1) The “old” Berea was exemplified by Victorian, Edwardian and Union houses, wide verandahs, bay windows, gables, often iron roofs, in substantial gardens. While some 700 of these houses were demolished between 1970 and 1982 (in a time of substantial migration into Durban, much of it lodging on the Berea, close to the CBD and its amenities), many remain. At the same time, 2,300 flats were being built in the area, increasing the residential density (*Management Plan* 3) and providing a basis for “some very upmarket development” in the 1990s (*Management Plan* 6).

Under the Group Areas Act, the Berea was designated as a “White” area, and, culturally, remained almost totally English-speaking rather than Afrikaans. Nonetheless, significant numbers of Zulu-speaking people continued to live in the area throughout the apartheid years, almost all of them in *khayas* or backyard rooms. That pattern continues in the post-Group Areas period. These residents are the descendants of the people Katie Makanya ministered to at McCords Zulu Hospital (McCord), domestic workers, gardeners, skilled trades people, whose labour Barend van Niekerk celebrated: “... the Zulus who have kept the city's wheels

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<sup>4</sup> A well-travelled seventeen-year old Berea resident reacting to a description of her area as a “walled” environment.

turning and its fires burning. Not a single thing of beauty in Durban was created but it was created by the hand of a Zulu who pushed the barrow, wielded the axe, dug the trenches, lit the fires or burnished the brass." (19) They are people whose numbers even now are underestimated: many live "below the radar" (as a Musgrave resident expressed it), for reasons that range from historical habit to suspicion of the intentions of government.

Both "over the ridge" in the Sydenham/Sparks Road area, and below the Berea, on the flats of Greyville, Grey Street and the Warwick Avenue Triangle, which quietly and successfully resisted the relocations of Group Areas Act for long enough into the 1980s that it managed to retain its multi-racial, but predominantly Indian, character (Maharaj), lived populations from whose numbers have come new Berea residents in the 1990s. As John Western asks about areas of Cape Town: "Is what one is seeing here the re-beginning of a South African nonracial residential experience?" In a process that is sometimes locally called "Indianisation," older houses have been rebuilt or demolished for townhouse or apartment complexes, drawing on contemporary South Asian (and occasionally Gulf) visual aesthetics, making their contribution to the ongoing process of changing streetscapes, a process which had been artificially truncated by the enforced segregation of Group Areas.

What remains unchanged in the streetscapes are the lush street trees and parks of the Berea, which are essential to its unique character: as the city council's *Status Quo Analysis* found in 2000: "The green environment represents possibly the most attractive feature of the Berea." (2.6.5) Historically, the Berea has also been renowned for its gardens, many of which still exist in all their sub-tropical fecundity but now, for the most part are hidden behind the high walls that have accompanied an increasing fear of crime. The walls are part of the physical defences and technologies against crime resorted to by Berea residents: in approximate order of introduction and use, burglar guards, walls, alarm systems (evoking armed response by private security companies), razor wire, wall spikes, remote controls for property entrances (garage and gates), direct entrance from garage to property, electric fences, private

guards (for individual houses and/or neighbourhoods) and laser beams.

Local residents are almost unanimous in dating the need for such precautions as the mid-1980s, after the Influx Control legislation was repealed (1986). Up until that time, the streets of white areas were comparatively empty of black South Africans. To be publicly visible in a white suburb without a specific reason (employment as domestic worker for the most part) was to invite a pass check and probable arrest. One impact of the repeal of Influx Control on areas such as white-designated suburbs across South Africa was, crudely, that the criminal violence that had long afflicted the relatively underpoliced black-designated township areas began to spill over into the suburbs. Township people were able to move more freely (although still subject to unofficial harassment) and almost immediately, in the memories of a number of my informants on the Berea, changes in both levels of crime and perceptions of threat began. Nonetheless, in an example which demonstrates the nuances of comparative memories, the historian Norman Etherington clearly remembers his astonishment at finding burglar bars on private houses on the Berea when he first went there as a young graduate student in 1968.

Historically, the white population had relied, completely, on the state for social control, at the heart of which lay the geographical segregation of the townships, and the Group Areas in town for the Indian population. Police in the townships were for the most part focussed on social control issues such as political crime and on transgressions of liquor and gambling legislation, whereas in the towns, cities and suburbs they had the time, numbers, equipment, and political will to focus on keeping the streets safe for residents. They functioned as what Baumgartner calls “champions or surrogates” (107), those servants of the state to whom these functions had been allocated. The clearly-defined territorial boundaries of the segregation/apartheid eras were both physical and metaphorical. They were, as Gary Baines found in Port Elizabeth, the consequence not only of particular local property development issues but also “of a fear of urban disorder and violence,” (qtd. in Robinson 51), a fear that had almost mythical qualities, of *Heart of*



*Darkness* proportions. The journalist Garry Allighan, writing in 1960, evoked images that were common currency at the time:

Neither religion nor education has completely eradicated all the manifestations of heathen ideas from the Bantu mind... It is this hangover from heathenism that has given the Bantu an instinct for violence. When the *Drum*—newspaper for the educated Bantu—invited readers to enter a short-story competition, violence, cruelty, ferocity and destruction were the themes of most of the manuscripts submitted (181).

Breyten Breytenbach's understandings were both more cerebral and more visceral: "Ours is the magical land of vanishing realities: we live in the kingdom of invisibility." (231) The state enabled life in the suburbs to be secure and comfortable, while life in the townships disappeared from the gaze of white South Africans, except at that simultaneously close and remote point of interaction, the domestic servant, the ubiquitous "maid." The protective umbrella of the national state (through the police and the army) was continued at the most mundane level through the local Corporation (as the City Council was popularly known). In particular, tree-lined streets were swept clean each day of debris and litter, creating an environment in which many residents walked for pleasure as well as purpose.

To move away from reliance on what Diana Gordon has called "state-centered social control" (57) in which the state has been the provider of public order and of safe and clean streets, has proved problematic but inevitable for many Berea residents. The gradual ratcheting up of the technologies of security, from the simplest burglar guards which householders with basic tools could install themselves, to the complexities of alarm systems and laser beams, requiring specialist installation and ongoing maintenance and monitoring, has been both a consequence of, and a contributor to, a changing relationship with the state. Amongst my informants, the perceived increase in violent crime from the mid-1980s but particularly since 1994, is described as being a consequence not only of the relaxation of the pass laws (influx control) but also of a police service which is having great difficulty in coping with a new policing environment. The authors of the Berea Community Police

Forum's new Business Plan go so far as to declare that "The SAPS tasked with policing the Berea patrol area is in dire need of community assistance in its assigned role of combating crime." (4.1) Thus, more and more residents have come to rely on private security companies (many owned and staffed by former police and army personnel). At the same time, the wholesale construction of perimeter walls (and I use the semi-military language advisedly), primarily for security although sometimes also for privacy and noise abatement, has, I suggest, substantially changed the relationship which residents have with the streets around them, and with their immediate neighbours.

Because of the perceived need for security, combined with the steep slopes that much of the Berea is built upon, the walls are often very high (more than two metres), often with additional rows of spikes, razor wire, or electric fencing, running along their top surfaces, and remote-controlled gates. Ironically, all of these measures are easily circumvented by a determined intruder: a thick rug is enough to deal with spikes and razor wire, and voltage meters are used by potential intruders to seek weak points. The walls are often, whether for financial, aesthetic or security reasons, blank expanses of masonry, with no architectural or structural detailing (which could provide a foothold for a potential intruder). The visual and affective impression, in many streets, is increasingly abrupt and severe, as the creation of non-human scale barriers severs the traditional interfaces between houses, gardens and streets. Many Berea residents, surrounded as they almost inevitably are by the remnants of a sub-tropical landscape, however find ways to conform to an aesthetic which is inclusive of greenery, not just in their own, increasingly private gardens, and in the trees of their streets, but through planting garden boxes along the exterior bases of their walls, using shrubs and small trees in large pots at front gates, and even in some instances using the vegetation as part of the wall of the property. A certain severity and restraint in the use of greenery is more commonly found in and around the newer gated townhouse and apartment complexes, and some of the "Indianised" houses, where a different aesthetic, relying on strong architectural and decorative detailing, is more apparent.

That is however the limit of social interaction with the street for many residents. Baumgartner described this phenomenon in American suburbia, as a means for residents of "... leaving problems with strangers behind them..." (107) and this holds true for a number of my informants who perceive that retreat behind their walls minimises or even eliminated the "incivilities" of interaction with potentially dangerous strangers. The notion of the wall is then extended to the walls that surround places of recreation or business. On the Berea, for example, while a comparatively few local residents use their immediate neighbourhoods to walk, jog, cycle, or exercise their dogs, many more go regularly to the Greyville Racecourse at the bottom of the hill to walk or run circuits in the early morning or evening. The racecourse is fenced and gated and so is widely considered secure (although one of my informants expressed concern that some areas of the fencing at a point abutting an area frequented by street children are being broken down). Another, younger informant, indicated that although she does use the racecourse, she prefers to walk in the streets, because in doing that she knows her neighbourhood and has a sense of place. That fine-grained sense of place that comes from detailed and frequent pedestrian use of the streets clearly is more difficult to sustain when an individual occupies the streets only through the mediation of a vehicle.

### **Illusions of security**

I knew a man who lived in fear  
It was huge, it was angry, it was drawing near  
Behind his house a secret place  
Was the shadow of a demon he could never face  
He built a wall of steel and flame  
And men with guns to keep it tame  
And standing back he made it plain  
That the nightmare would never ever rise again  
But the fear and the fire and the guns remain (Bright Blue).

In withdrawing behind walls, I suggest that residents are giving up the streets to the very people they fear: the street children and the criminals. The exceptions are the domestic workers, security guards and gardeners, whose social use of the street spaces

outside the walls is often vociferous and inclusive of men and women from surprisingly extensive neighbourhoods. The worker networks are recognised by some of my informants as central not only to the daily operation of households, but also to the informal transmission of information and news. Given the intense co-dependencies of employers and domestic workers that persist in South African daily life, and the longevity of employment, residence or other linkage with particular families, it is hardly unusual also to find intense commitments by some (if not many) workers to the protection of both place and people from outside intrusion. A local worker, for example, who is acutely aware of who is passing through the small area (of roughly a suburban block) which he considers his neighbourhood, frequently makes a point of telling other residents (whom he considers rather unobservant) what and whom he has seen on the streets and the lane that comprise that block. The workers moving in and out of the Berea in minibus taxis and on the City's buses, on the other hand seem almost invisible to many residents: young men will be noticed, with caution and perhaps some fear, but only because they are perceived as the most probable sources of trouble: others, particularly women, are simply background to the streetscape. For residents, moving from alarmed house through a locked garage to a vehicle fitted with gearlocks or alarms or satellite tracking, the life of the streets is blurred and often incomprehensible. Lack of use has led to lack of familiarity with the decoding and reading of street life, and that provides perfect cover for the intruders, who can blend into the streets and disappear from effective view.

Significantly, the City's *Management Plan* for the Berea incorporates a "Vision" for the future, one point of which is the creation of unique local neighbourhoods, "to promote a sense of identity, neighbourhood and community..." that includes "creating defensible residential neighbourhoods." (3.2.1.6) It is but a small step then to the theory of defensible space, which postulates that residents in a neighbourhood have, and make, choices about the extent to which they feel able to appropriate the spaces outside their walls, whether that is physical appropriation (walking in and through the spaces, activities in near-home space, such as children playing) or social appropriation through, for example, greeting and

talking with neighbours and visitors to the space, and speaks to the sense of ownership (or the lack of ownership) that residents have of the spaces around them (Brunson, Kuo and Sullivan).

I suggest that when physical and social appropriation is cut off at such sharply incised boundaries as massive perimeter walls, creating an impression of a siege mentality, what is being expressed in actuality is an atomistic notion of relationships both to the immediate neighbourhood and to the "state" as a wider entity. For example, with few exceptions, my informants told me that they either had had, or still have, very little knowledge of their immediate neighbours. Ian Lambie, the chair of the Berea Community Police Forum, speaks eloquently of the lack of community in the area, and the reluctance of residents to act positively rather than simply reactively in their own interests in the struggle against violent crime. This is recognised too in the City's *Status Quo* document, which indicates a practical concern for a sense of community, defining as one of its "Key areas of focus": "creating the preconditions for the establishment of neighbourhood spirit and responsibility where this does not exist." (10) Several of my informants spoke of the enclosed existences of neighbours and acquaintances, describing lives in which both partners in a marriage or relationship work long hours, and have little time for or interest in local affairs. Clearly, this is not unique to Durban, or indeed to South Africa, but rather reflects what Baumgartner defines as "... the morphology of their [middle-class] social relationships. Middle-class people tend to be socially anchored only loosely into their atomised and shifting networks of associates." (91) Yet the widespread fear of crime among Berea residents perhaps provides a particular nexus of notions of community, of rapid social and political changes, and responses to those changes, of which the perimeter walls represent a classic synecdoche, both symbol and reality of separation and division.

In such a complex area, senses of community can be acquired and articulated in unexpected ways. One of my informants, for example, sees crime and the Community Police Forum (CPF) as contributing to a greater sense of neighbourhood in her node of the central Berea, and suggests that the local CPF meetings have brought people together while the persistence of

criminal activity itself, despite the high walls that line every street in this part of the Berea, has caused neighbours to share telephone numbers, and to look out for each other's children and property. Paradoxically though, she adds that attending CPF meetings has also increased the extent of local knowledge, and therefore of fear, of crime in her area. The authoritative talking of crime through CPF meetings and its more or less ironic side effects though, is paralleled by the more common, daily, talking of crime between friends and co-workers. In these narratives, elaboration and exaggeration are more likely to intrude as half-heard or comprehended stories are passed on and change with every telling, like the children's game of Chinese Whispers. As Peter Bendheim, editor of the City's monthly *METRObeat* magazine, wrote in 1999:

I honestly wish that I could shake people up and get them to see what a really good city this is, not just because I'm paid to promote Durban—but because negativity spreads like wildfire and ends up making our worst fears a reality. That is not to say there are no problems in Durban—or in South African society, but I suspects [sic] that stories travel from person to person and become so exaggerated in the process of telling that it is impossible to sort out the urban legend from the reality (3).

In the creation and telling of such stories, social bonds are constructed and maintained: a sense of shared outrage, of shared victimhood, of shared values, reinforces an inchoate reading of “us” and “them,” underpinning a process of othering which enables facile understandings, and mitigates against any further exploration of what has happened and why. Private memories and fears are reconstructed as public discourse, the layers of meaning imbricated in an endless circle of telling and retelling. The repeated stories have an ontological quality, of deep-seated fears, of uncertainties and vulnerabilities which speak to much more than their ostensible subject: crime. I would argue that it is here that we can most clearly see the very real fear of crime as a metaphor for an unacknowledged fear of social and political change and of an amorphous and unstable threat to a way of life. That is not however to suggest that violent crime is not a reality on the Berea, but rather that amongst that while the elaborated stories play a social role,

and contribute to the development of the metaphor, the understated narrative of personal experience of surviving an intensely threatening criminal act, and the new understandings of what it meant to be living in South Africa at this time that slowly flowed from that experience over the next months, add quite different layers to the shared knowledges and perception of crime in the area.

Another significant topic for local narrations is the state of the public spaces of the area: the parks, and streets. In "a previous era," the Corporation was able to ensure that these public spaces were kept spotlessly clean and tidy, litter disposed of, lawns cut often, streets and pavements swept. Since 1994, as Durban/eThekweni has been enlarged to include the vast outlying townships which were for the most part excluded from the provision of services such as water, electricity, tarred roads, and regular rubbish removal before that time, the City has had to husband its resources and make different decisions about its priorities. As a consequence, while main roads on the Berea continue to be swept regularly by public employees, it is noticeable that secondary roads and lanes are much less cared for now. They have become, to a large extent, what Wilson and Kelling, in their seminal definition of "broken windows theory," call "untended spaces." Wilson and Kelling suggest that "... at the community level, disorder and crime are usually inextricably linked, in a kind of developmental sequence. Social psychologists and police officers tend to agree that if a window in a building is broken and is left unrepaired, all the rest of the windows will soon be broken. This is as true in nice neighborhoods as in rundown ones."

Some local residents move outside their own properties, and appropriate the space outside their walls, to themselves sweep the pavements and deal with fallen branches or other litter. Others detail their domestic servants to do so, a not uncommon sight in mid-morning on weekdays. Observation of the streets though indicates that such direct action is in the minority: the property boundary at the wall is the effective spatial and affective limit of ownership. Reactions by local residents to the action by one of my informants in sweeping the full length of a lane onto one portion of which his property abutted almost unanimously expressed

gratitude, surprise and a degree of bemusement that he would put so much private energy into a public space.

Such activities are, whether consciously or not, integral to a process of recognising that the streets have been abandoned by the residents, yet can be reclaimed. The understandings of Wilson and Kelling about the role of the symbolic “broken window” and of the many writers on defensible space, can be linked with the significant insights of Sally Engle Merry, again writing more than twenty years ago, in a work subtitled *Life in a neighbourhood of strangers*. In an ethnographic study, she explores the strategies that her informants articulate for “managing encounters with potentially dangerous people,” including styles of self-presentation, and the use of proactive greeting. This is also described by some of my informants as being used, quite independently, by some walkers on the Berea. In greeting everyone they pass, rather than simply fellow walkers, they are making a conscious attempt to be inclusive, but also to let anyone they pass who may be up to no good, planning a break in or a robbery, know that they have been noticed and will be recognised again. In this way, the ordinary civilities of everyday life are being used to re-appropriate the streets.

Another form of re-appropriation is being led by the Development Planning section of the City Council which has been working with property owners and tenants in the Florida Road area of the Berea to create an open and aesthetically pleasing set of spaces. In Florida Road can be found a number of restaurants, bars and cafes, as well as professional offices of various types, almost all of them in restored older houses, many of them two-storied, with elegant verandahs overlooking the street. The streetscape of the area has a special charm and the Development Planners have been encouraging its users to retain that and to enhance it wherever possible. These measures have included support for the conversion of tarred parking areas to concrete-supported grassed areas, the use of front yards and pavement areas by restaurant patrons, and the discouragement of high walls in favour of more elegant, and less tempting, see-through metal fences. This project specifically recognises that high, solid boundary walls, not only cut buildings off the street, drastically affecting the streetscape in the process, but in practice do no more than offer spurious psychological



protection to those behind them, not least because once the perimeter has been breached, the intruder is protected from the gaze of the street by the very wall that was meant to exclude him (or her).

### **Conclusion**

The world may change, but somehow this vocabulary of complaints against declining standards and morals is immunised against change. And the "golden age" is there once more: glimmering in the distance, just out of sight, back over the next hill, twenty years ago, "before the war." (Pearson 48)

To retreat behind large walls is a global rather than a peculiarly South African phenomenon. This small study of an upmarket residential area in Durban, reveals some of the inherited complexities that flow from South Africa's unique history of racial inequity and legislated racial segregation on a massive scale. In this area, violent crime, and the fear of violent crime, have both increased over the past decade and the responses for the most part have been technological in nature, increasing in intensity as criminals have responded to each technological innovation.

Intimately linked with the technologies of crime and of protection are the personal perceptions of violent crime and how to live with it. I suggest that the walls (and other "security" technologies) are metaphors representing a *mentalite* which is informed and indeed pervaded by a history of fear and a sense of siege. The widespread choice of technological defences has been an implicit rejection of proactive social mechanisms and, while the two approaches are not mutually exclusive, in practice they have been so. The sense of intermittent vulnerability that is expressed by many residents manifests itself through interrupted relationships with the spaces around them: the walls (and other protective technologies) are fabricated to minimise intrusion, yet ironically isolate and constrain those behind them. In the talking of crime, and in the search for coherent narratives, Berea residents interpret and make sense of the changes around them, implicitly rejecting some, accepting others. Their narrations of crime and its impact on

their lives in their small yet very privileged area of Durban are the core substance of their foundation myths of the new South Africa.

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