

To live and move in safety: Fear of crime, crime and the social consequences of spatial security strategies in Observatory, Cape Town

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Introduction

It is more or less taken for granted that crime rates in South Africa, violent crimes in particular, are very high. Beyond that things become less clear.

(Samara 2003)¹

It is not only more or less taken for granted that crime rates in South Africa are very high but it is also assumed that “South Africa remains a society divided against itself, no longer by the iron laws of apartheid, but by the fear and the threat of crime”.² According to surveys evaluating public opinion, after unemployment crime is one of the biggest problems in South Africa. Thus high crime rates are believed to threaten democratisation, as the South African government will be judged by its population to a certain extent upon its results in regard to their fight against crime and in their ability to provide citizens with safe neighbourhoods.³ It is not clear, whether crime rates are increasing or decreasing in South Africa because crime statistics and their reliability and modes of publication are an ongoing topic of debate.⁴ Furthermore statistics show how high the fear of crime is¹ and that it can become a bigger problem than crime itself.⁵ It is suggested that “people react to their perception of social problems rather than to the problems themselves”.⁶ Beyond this, things again become less clear.

The aim of this ethnographic research which I conducted in the suburb of Observatory in Cape Town between July and November 2003, was to get beyond the South African statistics, which indicate high crime rates, and to put forward data of more empirical nature in order to understand what role crime and fear of crime play in the shaping of people’s everyday lives.⁷ Analysis of this data suggests that not only is crime, or fear and crime, a threat to the process of democratisation, but, the security strategies residents develop to live and move in safety shape social life in a community as much as crime itself does. I argue that the implications and social consequences of these individual spatial security strategies go further than self-protection. By installing an ‘architecture of safety’ and changing their individual movement patterns and their habits in regard to the use of public space, residents’ security strategies have an effect on other members of the community and on social life in Observatory. This paper aims to examine these effects, and consider their consequences in relation to the production of fear and insecurity. I suggest, using ethnographic data, that the ‘architecture of safety’ interrupts public mutual systems of surveillance which not only contributes to the fear of crime but can also reinforce this fear or even facilitate crime itself.

Research setting

Observatory is situated seven kilometres south east of the central business district of Cape Town and covers an area of 182 ha. It is connected to the railway, which passes through the suburb and is very close to major transport intersections, which allows quick access to the greater

metropolitan area of Cape Town. These factors make the area not only attractive for residential development but also for industrial and commercial businesses.⁸

In the mid 1980s the suburb started to change significantly and, since then, has undergone a process of gentrification. The composition of the population changed notably between 1980 and 1985;⁹ the number of households in which families resided decreased; and households consisting of young couples or singles between the ages of 20-34 and houses with people over 65 began to dominate the population structure. Wealthier people, often with university degrees, moved in and the number of owner-occupiers increased, as did the value of properties since there was more income to renovate the old Victorian houses. This in turn meant that previous residents with lower incomes, mostly working-class households, were forced to move to other areas at a time when rents began to increase. Small shops closed and the first big supermarket opened. Further, a vibrant and 'trendy' bar and restaurant scene was established; antique shops and interior décor shops among others opened with the aim to attract wealthier middle- and upper-class.¹⁰ During the late 1980s and early 1990s a policy plan of the City of Cape Town and newspaper articles revealed that people began to install burglar bars and erect high walls as the demand for security increased. The main social problems of this period were according to the newspapers not crime, but increased traffic and parking problems, vagrancy, litter and lack of lighting on the street and the subway being perceived as 'unsafe' and 'filthy'.¹¹

In 2001, Statistics South Africa described Observatory as a middle- to upper-middle class suburb and home to 5.307 residents, with a high number of professionals and people with university degrees. The age group 20-34 was noted as still dominant.¹² According to estate agents whom I interviewed, property prices had increased steadily since the early 1990s and the population composition is changing from "students" and "hippies" to "more yuppies", that is "residents who are buying to live in Observatory". In 1997 a group of residents founded Obswatch, a community-policing organisation, as a response to increased crime problems in the neighbourhood. The suburb recently entered the headlines as a result of crime, which seems to have increased significantly since December 2002. While I prepared and conducted the research between February and November 2003 the suburb was preoccupied with implementing various strategies to increase residents' awareness of the need to work together in their fight against crime.

Fear of crime through German lenses

Coming from Germany, crime was something I had never thought about; fear of crime was something that I had never encountered, and experience of crime was something which had never touched my life. After my arrival in South Africa in February 2003, the social phenomenon of crime surprised me. I connected it with violence, loss and fear. Alone at home I was afraid of break-ins; driving around at night I was scared of hi-jacking; walking alone on the street during late hours I was worried about getting mugged. Before I even entered South Africa my personal fear was awakened and shaped as I was surrounded by German public text knowledge which associates South Africa with images of violent crime, fear and danger. However, it is noteworthy that I learned to fear these things in South Africa not through my own experiences of crime, but through other people's encounters with crime. I observed people who had to deal with break-ins, muggings, robberies or whose friends and relatives became the victims of stabbings, hijackings or shootings. I learned in practice through the reactions of the

victims or of the people around them, firstly, how to protect myself from becoming a crime victim but also to cope emotionally with crime incidents, by watching, practicing and internalising the habits of people around me regarding crime. Most surprising, however, was that fear of crime was not consciously expressed by most of the people in my surrounding or by the participants in my project, besides some of the people who had been recent victims of violent crime.

Methodology

Between July and November 2003 research was conducted amongst residents living in Observatory. Informants emerged from three sources. Firstly I asked people who I had made contact with after arriving in Cape Town in February 2003 if they could assist in setting up a meeting with any acquaintances they might have in Observatory. Further contacts were made through informants, which introduced me to other residents or brought other people to our meetings. The fifteen research subjects were aged 18 through to 68 and were made up of professionals, students and highly skilled workers.

To avoid my own fear and ideas about crime directing the fieldwork relationship into one specific direction, and to avoid people telling me what they thought they should say about fear of crime and crime in Observatory, the research strategy was not to ask initially about their personal fear and thoughts about crime but to begin the research with social mapping. I visited people's homes and after telling them about my research project I asked them to point out to me on a copied map, size A4, of Observatory which spaces and places they visit, where they walk, which public or private facilities they use, how and when they get there. I then asked the interviewed residents to locate crime incidents they remembered on the same map and to indicate places, streets and areas in Observatory, which they perceived as safe or unsafe. Important was also to find out whether they perceived the same areas differently depending if it is day or night.

I assumed the map would assist people to consciously remember their everyday practices. However, the method did not fulfil its aim with most of my informants. It seems that the piece of paper looked neutral to them, that is, it did not give the informant any triggers to recall practices, feelings and sensual information experienced in the space we were looking at on the map. Some informants could not read the cartographical map or, had problems locating places and streets. Having said that the social mapping method did not fulfill its aim, the information gathered through this response was nevertheless significant. It allowed for a first impression of people's everyday life rhythm, a sense of their perception about safe and unsafe parts of Observatory and about their personal crime experiences. Adding to this was the development of a comfortable basis for further conversation. It must be emphasised, however, that in what detail research subjects drew on the map, how much time they spent on it, what kind of things happened in the house and outside during the social mapping and people's reaction to it, and the stories informants wanted to talk about around the subject of crime, fear of crime and prevention measures were much more 'useful' than the actual information the maps revealed. In addition, informants were asked to write down a list of their prevention measures which are installed and used in their houses. The same problem occurred; informants could not remember consciously what kinds of prevention measures they use and possess. And again the 'hidden and silent' information revealed more than the data I was originally looking for.

It became evident that what people say they do and think they do is not necessarily an accurate indicator of what they actually do.¹³ Giddens (1984) refers to the *practical consciousness* in relation to the activities and knowledge people do and have when they 'go on' with their lives, as for example waking up, getting dressed or activating the alarm system, avoiding 'unsafe places' or unlocking and locking security gates. People do not think about these everyday activities consciously, and people tend to apply this internalised knowledge, expressed in these practices, without further discussion or consideration. *Discursive consciousness* includes the practices and the knowledge people are more aware of on a conscious level for example when they talk about crime experiences, discuss the bombardment by crime on news TV or look for a house with extra security – all of which is information the researcher can find out through asking questions in conversations with the research subjects.

Initially I planned to do only social mapping with the informants at the first meeting and then choose four out of the twelve informants for a further in-depth-conversation. Because social mapping was not entirely adequate to acquire the necessary data and because informants showed great interest in talking to me I also followed up the social mapping with a conversation, with each research subject. These conversations lasted between forty-five minutes and three hours. I guided the conversation by initially asking questions about relevant issues which came up during the social mapping and focused on listening to all the different themes informants connected to crime in Observatory. This revealed mostly knowledge on a discursive level, but also helped uncover residents' everyday practices and practical consciousness.

Given this limitation on verbal information, it was necessary to find data based on actual behaviour. To find out what role crime and fear of crime plays in people's lives on a practical level was challenging to discover for a couple of reasons. 'To hang around' and experience crime and fear of crime as informants do is nearly impossible or not achievable. Participant observation in public spaces to ascertain what people do is also problematic because the public sphere, in the residential parts of Observatory, is mostly empty. Furthermore, these public spaces are privatised which does not allow a lot of insight into people's personal life. The consequence was that I 'hung around' and walked around on my own a lot and noted everything which did or did not happen and everything I could see or could not see. Within this process I started to focus on particular on houses' architectural safety design and on what kind of relationship existed between the design and the shape of Observatory's streetscapes and landscape.

In addition I spent as much of my personal time as possible in Observatory: going to local cafés, restaurants, bars and clubs, visiting friends, taking their dogs for walks and shopping at the local shops and supermarkets in order to obtain a deeper understanding of how people live their lives on an everyday level. I tried to find secondary data to compare the oral and observed data with, but it was difficult to get any relevant information. The South African Police (SAP) were not allowed to give me crime statistics, security companies were not available for an interview to find out how they operate, how many residents are their clients, buy their security products or how many calls they receive every day and estate agents did not have internal statistics such as how often a house changes its tenants or owners, how property prices of specific houses had increased or photo records of how house's architecture has changed over time. A major source of secondary data were newspaper articles about Observatory from the last thirty years, estate agents' adverts, police monthly newsletters and the community profile database of Statistics South Africa.

I explored residents' fear of crime and their spatial security strategies to live and cope with fear of crime and crime over five months by means of literature research, social mapping, open-ended conversations with fifteen residents, interviews with key-informants such as real-estate agents, SAP, the Observatory Business Forum and Observatory's community police Obswatch and participant observation within and around Observatory. In a country with such high crime rates I expected to find that people who experience fear of crime, are experts in crime prevention or perceive crime as a major problem in South Africa, but what I actually found was something quite different.

Fear of crime: Strengthening of the boundaries between private and public spaces

I am walking around the streets in Observatory. The streets are almost deserted and empty.¹⁴ The only streets, which are active, are one part of Lower Main Road where shops and cafes are located and the streets which link the Minibus taxi stops on Main road with the Railway Station. I observe people from different social backgrounds anonymously encountering each other. Some people recognised other pedestrians and stop to greet each other. The cafes along Lower Main Road are busy and people sit down to have refreshments and watch the ongoing activities on the streets through the windows. On Station Road vendors sell their merchandise on the pavements and customers shop and chat with them for a few minutes.

By contrast, other parts of Observatory lack any kind of street life. The atmosphere feels hostile. The boundaries between the public and private are clearly expressed by iron fences with special spikes; through full height walls topped with electric wires which obstruct any view into the property. I feel intimidated by the number of signs of 'ARMED RESPONSE' and the number of watchdogs barking at me. People, behind their gates, fences and walls are looking at me suspiciously. It seems that they are not used to and do not appreciate people walking around, looking curiously at their houses and gardens, or who are looking for a chat over the fence. Public facilities like playgrounds and park areas, which are marked by signs of neglect, remain unused or unable to be used because they are locked. Occasionally I meet parents with their children and people walking their dogs in the afternoon hours. The majority of people who are walking through the area during the day are 'informal' residents namely vagrants with their trolleys who ask for food or money and check the dustbins for valuable things. Other people are only daily visitors, such as beggars who knock on people's doors to ask for food, clothes or money, workers like gardeners, domestic workers, construction workers and in the morning and around five, people who are walking down from the minibus taxis to the station. The majority of other observed people and residents move around in cars.

I stop in front of one house to look closer at the signs of 'ADT', 'Obswatch', 'Mr. Spike' and 'City Alarm'. Behind the full height wall judging by their growls, two big dogs start barking at me until a woman arrives in her car at the front of the house. The woman presses the remote control and the gate opens automatically. She drives inside and the floodlights automatically switch on although it is about four o' clock in the afternoon. While the gate is open I can see the Rhodesian ridge back and the Rottweiler cross, which barked at me until a few seconds ago in the most hostile manner, running around, still barking but now in a friendly manner while wagging their tails and welcoming the woman. While the gate is closing automatically I can see the woman unlocking her car, then

pressing her car remote control to activate the car alarm and immobilizer. After the gate is closed again I can hear her saying hello to the dogs, unlocking the security gate of the house, then the door of the house; then the alarm starts to beep and the two different doors are closed. The woman noticed me because we made eye contact, but pays me no further attention.

(Fieldnotes: Thursday, 4 September, 2003)

Fear of crime and the experience of crime are leading to the development of houses where people believe they are safe and protected. One is not likely to see houses without burglar bars, security gates, fences or walls in Observatory.¹⁵ The few houses whose residents risk living in a house that is not protected by any kind of material security strategies are rare and, during the six month period between initiating and concluding the research, I observed how unprotected houses were disappearing. The inclination with regard to houses which have been recently renovated is to increase the height of the walls. Houses, which have been newly built are situated in walled complexes or tend to be designed with fewer windows facing out to the street and to integrate the prevention measures into the architectural design of the house with the intention to reduce the opportunities for burglars to enter the house to a minimum. Not only private spaces are secured, but also communal facilities like playgrounds, parks, parking lots or sports fields are separated with high fences and gates from the public sphere. Furthermore, residents in Observatory pay private security companies to look after their property and to patrol the streets around their houses. Having said that, the 'architecture of safety' and individual material security strategies do not only protect individuals and private property in Observatory. By strengthening the boundaries between private property and public streets; by purchasing security rather than maintaining it through sociality; by focusing on the safety of the individual instead of the safety of the community as a whole; residents' material safety culture has an effect on other members of the community and on the shape of social life in Observatory.

In what follows, I start by exploring why and when residents feel the need to install prevention measures; what kind of feelings people have about them and how far the applied prevention measures help to establish a feeling of security, and, how far do they go to fulfil their aim to prevent crime? I then discuss case studies of houses' security design, looking at specific design elements people choose to incorporate. I explore the relationship between design of houses and the street life and streetscapes of Observatory. Finally, I examine the impact the 'architecture of safety' and the increased use of cars have on the public systems of surveillance in Observatory. How far does the houses' security design undermine residents' opportunities to create social networks in the community and thus reinforce the need for the purchase of individual security? To what extent does house and street design contribute to a safer environment, and, to what extent does it contribute to crime and fear of crime?

For centuries walls and gates have been a part of everyday life to regulate and control the relationship between private and public spaces. Private space finds its socially recognised and accepted expression for example in private property. Michel de Certeau and Luce Giard (1998) suggest that private property is a space which is closely linked with a sense of ownership, privacy and identity.¹⁶ That means a person's home has something exclusive, it is this person's private space and therefore cannot be somebody else's private space at the same time. It provides ideally a space where the person can withdraw from the public sphere's pace and anonymity, where the social and physical body is undisturbed by undesirable elements and free from any

social duties and rules. The person does not have to work at home most of the time and can instead find rest and protection. However, as Ali Madanipour (2003) argues “the concern for privacy and the need for protecting it are [...] often set against the fear of its violation by intrusion and loss of control”.¹⁷

The most common response to crime and fear of crime amongst interviewed and observed informants was to materially strengthen the boundaries between their properties and the public space. Residents whom I interviewed pointed out that they tended to feel unsafe and started to reduce opportunities for intruders to enter their properties, when incidents of crime occurred around them or when their next-door neighbours erected high walls, fences and other kinds of security measures. For example, Susan mentioned that she was not very eager to put a wall up, because it would destroy the character of her Victorian house. But she nevertheless, felt she had had to, because she was under the impression that all her neighbours were erecting walls and if she did not follow this trend she felt her house would be left as an easy target for any burglar. Susan was thinking also of installing an alarm system in her house, because she believed that her house was not safe during the day anymore when nobody was at home, because her next-door neighbours had experienced break-ins.

Interviewed victims of crime who had recently had their house broken into especially felt the need for more protection. Annika, 27, and Daniel, 30, who experienced several violent and non-violent crimes within a few months outside and inside their home mentioned that they were afraid that they were not safe anywhere anymore. Daniel said: “I don't feel it is my house anymore, since they broke into it”. Annika, who was burgled while she was at home, could not stay in her flat for a while and felt constantly scared. She said: “I feel uncomfortable and unsafe at home, because you being at home doesn't stop them”. Both said that they could cope with the loss of material things, but that the experience that they did not feel safe at home anymore and that there was no space anymore where they could withdraw from the public was for them a tremendously painful and shocking experience. Daniel's reaction to being mugged with a knife in front of his house and to the break-in, was not to install more security measures. The house was already highly protected, but in going one step further Daniel moved out to a safer area into a flat in a safety complex with increased security features, where he hoped he could feel more comfortable and safer again. Annika also said that she had “had enough of Observatory” after she got burgled the second time within six months and said she wanted to move out, if she could find a place in town which she could afford. Meanwhile, she pointed out that she had tried to negotiate with her landlord to put more security measures into the flat such as installing a new security door and barbed wire around the drain pipe, because she suspected that the burglar used it to get over the balcony into her flat.

Annika's and Daniel's experiences and reactions emphasise that it was not so much the loss of material goods that caused them pain and fear after the burglary, but the violation of their private spaces and the feeling that the burglars did not respect the boundaries of their private places. Annika and Daniel felt that the burglars had taken their homes away. Home is more than just a physical space, where somebody resides and dwells. De Certeau and Giard (1998) explain that a home is a space that tells the ‘life history’ of the person who is living in the space and about his or her habits, desires and everyday activities.¹⁸ Using de Certeau's and Giard's metaphor of home it becomes understandable why Annika and Daniel felt that nothing belonged to them anymore.

Through the burglary they had not only lost their possessions but had been forced indirectly to “tell an intimate story” about themselves, which they probably did not intend to tell strangers. Furthermore the meaning which they gave to their homes has suddenly changed through the crime event that had taken place: their homes had been associated with places where events were predictable and where they could find rest, privacy and security, but that space was now linked with unpredictability, insecurity and fear.

This feeling was increased by the perception of a social back-up system which was seen to have failed to adequately protect them. For example, Annika disapproved of, “how useless the neighbourhood watch ‘Obswatch’ is. They don't have a right to arrest. They are small lazy guys on bicycles. They can't do anything and are not interested in investigating. They are pathetic”. Daniel pointed out how shocked he was that it took the police one hour to respond to his emergency call. Evette, 29, another informant, complained after she was a victim of crime, “the insurance company treated me like a criminal. They were useless. [...] I felt betrayed.” She pointed out how she started to lose “belief in the democratic system, because you contribute labour and money, but then the insurance company cheats on you”. The informants’ statements show how disappointing experiences with the social support system, which is actually there to assist people to cope with traumatic experiences like crime, in the end reinforced their feelings of loss, helplessness and vulnerability, which one felt after being victimised. Their experiences and perceptions of an insecure everyday life in an unsafe and unpredictable environment led to an impression that informants believed that they had to protect themselves with material security strategies or purchase private security, as they did not feel safe again otherwise.

Security: a commodity?

Other interviewed residents reacted in a similar way; they did not complain about the offenders but about the institutions whose business it is to prevent crime, protect people or to reduce the damage after they had been victim of crime. It seems that informants made private security companies, insurance companies and the material security industry responsible for the crimes, which they experienced because they purchased or contracted with them, with the expectation that they would have a positive influence on their security. On the one hand, informants “feel betrayed” in the moment when they realise that their financial effort to feel and be safe has been ineffective. On the other hand interviewed residents searched at the same time for further protection within the private and material security sector and gave increased trust to them to get professional protection for themselves and their property. Interviewed residents revealed an ambiguous relationship towards private security and prevention measures, mainly because they did not always fulfil the intended aim.

For example, Nicola, 35, said on the one hand that they do not switch on the alarm, which was in the house when they bought it, because it does not help. In their old house they had used it, but even so they had had one break-in and, in a very relaxed manner, she said: “if somebody wants to break in they can anyway”. On the other hand, she pointed out a few minutes later in detail how they were going to build a kind of ‘panic room’ in the form of internal security gates in their house, where the family could lock themselves in during the night. Furthermore, she explained that they leave the windows and backdoors open so that the dog can run around, because she did not believe that a locked door would stop somebody breaking in. However, Nicola said that although the house had a full height wall she was worried that people could look through the

postal aperture and see that the house had no burglar bars. Therefore she was planning to install some at the front.

Nicola's example suggests that residents have, simultaneously had no trust and high expectations in their purchased private technological and material security measures. It seems that most of the residents interviewed do not have any expectation towards their neighbours and the community. Neither was seen as a mode of protection that might offer safety for the individual household and on which informants could rely for the maintenance of safety in their neighbourhood. For example, although Nicola pointed out that she felt comfortable in the neighbourhood and liked the "village atmosphere" – yet she did not want to stay at home alone when her husband was away. Other informants also expressed a reluctance to rely on their neighbours to assist in establishing safety. Some research subjects did not ask the neighbours to keep an eye on their property while they were away, preferring to request the private security company to do so and to get a house sitter to live in the house for that time.

In these ways, security is purchased rather than maintained through neighbourhood sociality in Observatory. Some informants maintained their safety by relying on financial rather than social capital. Putnam (cited in Madanipour, 2003) understands social capital as the:

Norms and networks of civil society that lubricate cooperative action among both citizens and their institutions. Without adequate supplies of social capital – that is without civic engagement, healthy community institutions, norms of mutual reciprocity and trust – social institutions falter.¹⁹

Lang and Hornburg (cited in Madanipour, 2003) define social capital as referring to the "stocks of social trust, norms, and networks that people can draw upon in order to solve common problems".²⁰ It seems that informants in Observatory did not "draw anymore on social networks to solve the common problem crime" but maintained an anonymous financial relationship with private security companies and insurance companies to protect themselves. Their safety was thus not in the social system of "mutual reciprocity and trust" within the community but within the financial system where security is a commodity, where people felt that there were unmistakable obligations between the company and the customer. In other words, people felt they should be safe because it was the duty of the security company to take care of them, as residents paid them to receive their security service.

Drawing on Madanipour (2003), who defines communities and neighbourhoods as places, which are thought to prevent social fragmentation and alienation between citizens within the city, I explore now, after discussing in more detail the security design of Observatory's houses, how far the 'architecture of safety' undermines residents' opportunities to create social networks in the community and thus reinforces the need for the purchase of individual security.

The 'architecture of safety': Observatory's residents search for security

According Madanipour (2003), communities are seen within urban theory as a space in the city where, through the reduction of impersonal encounters, residents get to know each other. This enables residents to create social networks with the aim of helping and supporting each other but also socialising with each other on a less anonymous level than within the city. The community allows residents to have control over the space they dwell in, which enables them to weaken the

boundaries between the private and public sphere, in other words, to extend their private space of the home into the public sphere of the neighbourhood.²¹ However, the majority of the residents of the observed houses in Observatory did not extend their private space towards the public sphere but differentiated the boundaries between their private spaces and the public sphere distinctly through concrete walls and iron or wooden fences in different heights and designs. The wall and fences make it quite clear who is the owner of a particular place and where the violation of private space would start, with the implication that a stranger would have to justify his or her presence once he/she entered the property. The observed houses of Observatory reveal that the neighbourhood offers many residents a personal intimate space on the one hand, which as de Certeau (1984) suggests is linked with a strong sense of ownership, identity and privacy. For example, some back and front gardens of informants were totally privatised and closed in, as the high walls and fences did not allow neighbours or people on the street any view into the gated and walled property.

On the other hand, the perceived sense of ownership did not go further than their own private space. It did not seem that many people extended their personal care and concern to spaces which were outside their private sphere – that is, toward the street, which is according to Madanipour (2003) crucial to creating feelings of sociality in a neighbourhood. On the contrary, because of fear of crime, informants strengthen the boundaries between their private property and the public spaces. To set foot in these private residences was difficult, as observed houses did not often have personalised entrances; or it was not possible from the outside to make out who was the owner of the property as houses did not have any indication of name tags or number plates. Some properties were not possible to enter without phoning the owner, because the high perimeter walls, fences and gates did not even have an intercom system or other modes which indicate to the resident that visitors are in front of the house.

In addition, it does not seem that the effort some residents put into renovating their houses and designing their gardens had the aim to contribute something to the architectural value of the whole neighbourhood as the owners ‘hide’ their houses behind walls.²² As noted previously, houses, which have been recently built or renovated have the tendency to increase the height of their walls and fences or to be designed with fewer windows facing out to the street and to integrate the prevention measures into the architectural design of the house with the intention to reduce the opportunities for intruders to enter the house to a minimum. In addition it is noticeable on recently renovated houses that house owners individualised and camouflaged material security measures. The defensive character of gates and walls topped with spikes is transformed by using instead ‘Mr. Spike’ – hard-edged flowers which have more similarity with pieces of art than with prevention measures to keep out intruders. Some other observed houses made use of ‘Eina Ivy’, spikes which look like Ivy and which are sold as a product which can add ‘Value, Beauty and Safety’ to properties at the same time.

Consequences for street life and streetscapes – danger for social networks and the safety of community

Urban planners concerned with crime prevention through environmental design agree that the practice of hiding houses behind walls, fences and hedges destroys the system of ‘mutual surveillance’ in a neighbourhood.²⁴ Mutual surveillance includes ‘active’ and ‘passive’ surveillance.²⁵ ‘Active surveillance’ refers to the act of policing by the police and private

security companies, whose task it is to provide systematic institutionalised and professional surveillance. 'Passive surveillance' implies the public and private spaces are observed through people's everyday patterns of residence and circulation. In terms of house design, residents provide a natural system of surveillance; for example, when doors, windows, alleys, fences or walls are located in such a way that allows them to monitor activities that are occurring in their own house on the street. Furthermore, this system is a mutual one. That means that people from the outside, who pass the property, can also observe what is going on in front of or inside the house. Thus, the design of residences and streets and the number of people, who are using the open public space, can increase the feeling that there is a constant mutual circle of observation, which in turn can reduce residents' fears and keep back criminals.

In Observatory, for example, the system of mutual surveillance is profoundly interrupted in streets where the majority of houses have non-transparent, high walls. On the one hand, houses and people on the street are left without observation from the walled properties and on the other hand the walled houses are without regular surveillance from the public. In terms of 'active surveillance' Obswatch pointed out another negative effect of walls in that they hinder the work of security guards to patrol the house because they cannot see what is going on inside the property once the intruder is over the wall.

Furthermore, this kind of built environment can reinforce resident's feelings of fear and the need to take a car to move around as the pedestrian can not be seen by the residents of the walled house. This example reveals that the relationship between the built environment and social actions is not a neutral one, but people's social actions are influenced by their environment and the built environment is shaped by social actions.²⁶ In other words, there is a direct relationship between sociality and spatiality; residents' decision to use a car because it is safer is influenced by an environment which is perceived to be unsafe, but the built environment is also shaped by social actions which means that through the increased use of cars, the streets are becoming less safe. The reason mentioned by most of the informants as to why they take their car to get somewhere is that it is 'safer'. The car allows interviewed and observed residents, without too much inconvenience, to take safer travel routes instead of the direct way, without spending much more time. The car is a fast moving personal room; Madanipour (2003) calls it "the ultimate portable territory". People can lock it from the inside and feel safe and distant from disturbing elements of the outside world: "The public road is then sometimes carpeted by private boxes. The prevalence of cars in the city has historically reduced pedestrian safety and comfort [...] The personal space of the pedestrian was a small space around the body, which was now enlarged to the moving glass and metal box of the car. [...] Driving a car is 'a way to feel social without having to be social'".²⁷

The social consequence is that people, who cannot seek protection behind a "moving glass and metal box", are on the streets and are therefore more vulnerable to for example muggings, armed robberies or rapes. Not only certain architectural safety designs but also the different moving paces of people and cars undermine the opportunity for residents to provide a certain kind of public mutual surveillance system for each other. It is difficult to see exactly what is going on outside when driving in a car and concentrating mostly on the ongoing traffic and on what is in front of you. Music sound systems in cars can also reduce the chances that the person in the car can hear other people calling for help. Furthermore, if more residents use a car, less people walk

on the streets, which means, less people are available to come to assist victims of crime in cases of emergencies. Only one informant pointed out how the use of cars can influence the safety of every community member in the streets. The Chairman of the Business Forum, mentioned that although he has access to a car he tries to walk as much as he can through Observatory, and he recommend that other people do the same. The streets would then be safer, especially at night, because other people walking could see what is going on and help each other if there is a need for it.

Another effect of these spatial security strategies which cannot be developed further within the frame of this article but it is nevertheless crucial, is that people from different social backgrounds have less chance to encounter anonymously with each other. This in turn can create an uncomfortable feeling or even fear of the others, which should be differentiated from the fear of crime.

Conclusion

The aim of this study has been to get beyond the crime statistics and add data of a more everyday nature to the topic of fear of crime and crime in South Africa. It argued that there is a strong relationship between sociality, spatiality and safety; or between abandoning street life and social networks and the increasing 'architecture of safety' which is essential to consider when exploring the impact crime has on people's everyday life. The findings of this study suggest that there are social consequences not only of crime, but also of the spatial security strategies against fear of crime and crime in Observatory. Individual spatial security strategies go further than private self-protection. The increased use of cars and the focus on the 'architecture of safety' not only interrupts social networks of protection and surveillance, but can reinforce fear of crime or facilitate crime itself. Moreover, the purchase of safety fulfils the needs of the security of some individuals rather than the safety of other members of the neighbourhood and of the community as a whole.

In conclusion, I want to emphasise three reasons why much more research is needed in this important area. First, what does it mean for the security of households which cannot rely on their financial capital to maintain safety? Does it mean that some houses and residents are becoming safer as other become less so? It is important to raise these questions to indicate in what direction individual purchased security might develop.

Second, I suggest that this project is significant at the level of 'architecture of safety' – education. This idea was raised in the field and also came out of discussions with other people who were very interested in the alternative perspective this project opened up with regards to relationship between sociality, spatiality and safety. In addition, the study has shown that although a lot of observed and interviewed residents have ambiguous feelings towards their prevention measures they seemed to be unaware that their prevention measures might be counterproductive to their fight against crime.

Third, the approach that crime and fear of crime is to a certain extent influenced by the shape of the streetscapes of a neighbourhood and can be prevented through environmental design is, relatively new and untested in South Africa.²⁸ From the urban planning side, there is an awareness that the concept is not a universal solution in terms of crime prevention, but can make a significant difference in relation to some kinds of crimes and to the quality of people's life and

is especially successful when it is applied on a local basis.²⁹ Urban planners concerned with crime prevention have realised that to focus on the physical environment without taking into consideration people's individual fears, their patterns of residence and circulation and their everyday needs and habits with regard to the use of public space is not enough. Unfortunately the review of studies, which worked with the concept of planned place-based crime prevention, within this research, shows that this aim is not yet successfully realised and that researchers only mention the need for much more qualitative data in this area, but are not actually gathering the data.³⁰

With regard to this point, this paper sees a strong need for the disciplines of Social Anthropology and Urban Planning to work together. Urban planners can help anthropologists with their different perspectives on the city's environment and professional knowledge about the use of materials and design to produce research, which is more multi-perspective. Furthermore, this paper argues that this ethnographic project and its results and assessments can contribute, with its detailed explorations of how people move and live in safety and of the complex socio-cultural and political-economical everyday structures around fear of crime and crime and spatial security strategies, to the challenging process of urban planners and architects to design and plan safer spaces in an environment and society, which is becoming more and more complex.

¹ T. Samara, 'State Security in Transition: The War on Crime in Post Apartheid South Africa', *Social Identities* (2003), vol. 9, no. 2, p. 285.

² B. Dixon, *Clouds over the rainbow: Crime and transition in South Africa*, (Institute for Justice and Reconciliation, Research report: 2002), 13 October, 2003, <www.ijr.org.za/pdfs/Dixonncube.pdf>. See also J. Dixon & S. Reicher, 'Intergroup contact and desegregation in the new South Africa', *British Journal of Social Psychology* (1997), vol. 36, p. 361-381.

³ K. Shubane, 'A question of balance: crime-fighting in a new democracy', in J. Steinberg (ed), *Crime wave. The South African Underworld and its Foes*, (Witwaterstrand University Press: Johannesburg, 2001) p.187; Afrobarometer 'The Changing Public Agenda: South Africans' Assessment of the Country's Most Pressing Problems.'; *Afrobarometer Briefing Paper 5* (2003): 1-4, 9 September, 2003, <<http://www.afrobarometer.org>>. The Institute for Democracy in South Africa (Idasa) has every year since 1994 concluded research on "What are the most important problems facing this country that the government ought to address?". The 2003 report points out that crime is the second most important problem after unemployment, job creation and before concerns over poverty. L. Glanz, *Crime in South Africa*, (HSRC: Pretoria, 1994); L. Glanz, *Managing Crime In The New South Africa*, (HSRC: Pretoria, 1993); A. Louw, 'Bad News? Crime Reporting: Trends and Effects', *Crime Conflict* (1997), vol. 8, p. 1-4.

⁴ The government's way of reacting to the increase of crime over the last few years has repeatedly been the object of criticism. People who disagreed with the government with regard to crime declining were for example "labelled [...] as unpatriotic." (Shubane 2001:187). The moratorium on crime statistics during eleven months of 2000 and 2001 especially caused public disapproval and has probably not helped to increase the public confidence in the government's security policies. Although the moratorium is officially over and crime statistics are officially released quarterly it was still not possible for me to get crime statistics from the police, although it is law in South Africa that "[e]veryone has the right of access to any information held by the state" (section 32 (a) Act 108 of 1996, RSA. No. 108 of 1996: *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa*. Office of the President. Pretoria: RSA 18 December 1996).

⁴ L. Glanz, *Coping with crime: the South African public's perception of and reaction to crime*, (HSRC: Pretoria, 1989)

⁵ A. Louw, p. 2.

⁶ Lewis in Glanz, p. 5.

⁷ I make the distinction between "fear of crime" and "crime" in regard to non-victims and victims and perception about crime and practical knowledge about crime incidences. As a result of my interviews I argue that non-victims

and victims have different fears and thoughts about crime. Victims are afraid that 'it will happen again' or a more serious incident of crime could happen to them. There is difference between people who have the perception that this behaviour or this street is unsafe, but this perception is not actually based on knowledge about crime and between people who have the experience or the knowledge through other people and public text knowledge that specific crime incidents have occurred and now they fear it could also happen to them.

⁸ L. Smitheman, *Observatory Policy Plan: Issues*, (City of Cape Town: Cape Town 1989), p. 3-7.

⁹ J.P. Pelaez-Montoya, *Gentrification in Observatory*, (University of Cape Town: Cape Town, 1987), (Unpublished Honours Thesis), p. 72; L. Smitheman, p. 13.

¹⁰ J.P. Pelaez-Montoya, p.72-75.

¹¹ *Cape Argus*, 8 March 1989 'Residents discuss future of suburb'; 28 February 1991 'Observatory residents fear assault in using 'filthy' subway'; 21 May 1993 'Suburbs get boost for conservation'; *Cape Times*: 29 July 1992 'New centre will help hungry and homeless'; *Liesbeek News*: 27 April 1988, 'Solving the Observatory traffic problem'.

¹² Statistics South Africa, *Population census. Community Profile Database*, (Statistics South Africa: Pretoria, 2001).

¹³ P. Bourdieu, 'Structure, Habitus, Practice', in P. Erickson & LD Murphy (eds), *Reading for a History of Anthropological Theory*, (Broadview Press: Ontario, 2001); A. Giddens, *Central Problems in Social Theory*, (Macmillan: London, 1979); A. Giddens, *The Constitution of Society; Outline of the Theory of Structuration*, (Polity press in association with Basil Blackwell: Cambridge, 1984).

¹⁴ It must be emphasised that the abandonment of streets is to be seen in context to and in comparison with other areas of Cape Town. For example area like Mannenburg or Lwandle, less affluent suburbs, have according to my own experience much more street life than Observatory. In comparison to Oranjezicht or Higgovale, however, more affluent areas, Observatory's public spaces seem less deserted.

¹⁵ This statement is based on observations in all streets of Observatory. Further on the results of detailed study of six different streets of Observatory where I counted in each street the prevention measures of twenty houses.

¹⁶ M. De Certeau, L. Giard & P. Mayol, *The practice of everyday life. Volume 2, Living and cooking*, (University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, 1998), p. 145.

¹⁷ A. Madanipour, *Public and Private Spaces of the city*, (Routledge: London, 2003), p. 46.

¹⁸ M. De Certeau, L. Giard & P. Mayol, p. 145.

¹⁹ A. Madanipour, p. 222.

²⁰ A. Madanipour, p. 222.

²¹ A. Madanipour, p. 162.

²² Low's (2003) and Caldeira's (2000) research in gated communities revealed that residents did not only move into these enclaves because of fear of crime but also in order to heighten their status and to live and socialise with people who are 'similar' to them. I suggest based on observation and interviews that the same point, which I made earlier that fear of certain places and people is not exclusively linked with fear of crime but also influenced by the 'fear of the other' and fear of social changes in the neighbourhood is also valid for the architecture of safety. It seems that informants did not only erect walls and fences because of fear of crime but also to keep their privacy and people they do not like outside their realm. S. M Low, 'The Edge and the Center: Gated Communities and the Discourse of Urban Fear', in S. M. Low & D. Lawrence-Zuniga (eds), *Anthropology of Space and Place. Locating Culture*, (Blackwell Publishing: Oxford, 2003), p. 387-407; T. P. R. Caldeira, *City of Walls. Crime, Segregation, and Citizenship in Sao Paulo*, (University of California Press: Berkeley, 2000).

²⁴ O. Newman, *Defensible Space: People and Design in the Violent City*, (Architectural Press: London, 1972); S. Crouch, H. Shaftoe & R. Fleming, *Design for secure Residential Environments*, (Longman: Harlow, 1999). R.H. Schneider & T. Kitchen, *Planning for Crime Prevention. A Transatlantic Perspective*, (Routledge: London, 2002).

²⁵ R.H. Schneider & T. Kitchen, p. 94.

²⁶ C. Tilley, *A Phenomenology of Landscape: Places, Paths, Monuments*, (Berg: Oxford, 1994), p. 17.

²⁷ A. Madanipour, p. 33-34.

²⁸ CSIR, Crime prevention through environmental design in South Africa: summary of a National Crime Prevention Strategy (NCPS) project that addressed Pillar 2: reducing crime through environmental design, undertaken by the Division of Building Technology, CSIR and ISS, (Pretoria: Division of Building Technology: Pretoria, 1999).

²⁹ R.H. Schneider & T. Kitchen, p. 306.

³⁰ T. Agbola, *The Architecture of Fear: Urban Design and Construction Response to Urban Violence in Lagos*, (IFRA, ABB: Nigeria, Ibadan, 1997); CSIR; M. Shaw, *Environmental design for safer communities: preventing crime in South Africa's cities and towns*, (Halfway House: Institute for Security Studies, 1998).

NOTES

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