Durban Townships. (Photo: Anna Irene Del Monaco)

Fig. 1, Fig. 2. Monique Marks: Not all houses in Umbilo are as open as the one depicted in Photo 1 (Fig. 1), most have boundaries that allow for two way visibility and for engagement. The house in Photo 2 (Fig. 2) is fairly typical of the boundary structure in the most affluent sections of Westville.

Testing Durban's cogency: The walls that divide

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Abstract: This essay tries to focus on the routine security practices that suburban dwellers have developed, and how this has impacted on the building of ties and common personhood within suburban spaces. In particular, the study explores the ways in which boundaries are created, literally, around individual freestanding houses in the suburbs, and the consequences of this for social relations and for safety.

Key words: Durban, security, design, renovation, sustainability.

In a recent and illuminating article on social cohesion and nation building published in the *Daily Maverick*, J Brooks Spector remarks that:

> "a language in common, the participation in shared institutions such as universal military service (such as in the US during World War II and afterwards), an education with many common elements, and a generally acknowledged core of stories, myths, heroes and traditions are not sufficient, in themselves, to create the fullest sense of national cohesion. Central to MITRA's brief for a greater national social cohesion was that South Africa needed a more equality and dignity for all citizens and less marginalisation from many elements of the country. This idea of social cohesion speaks to the 'glue' that brings a society together, especially in the context of national cultural diversity, but it cannot be a top-down imposition on the part of the politicians over a population of blank slates. Rather, it is something that must grow organically out of a country's society over time as people find the common ground among themselves".[1]

It is this notion of a more bottom-up, slow burn process of social cohesion that this chapter speaks to. It does so by focusing on the routine security practices that suburban dwellers have developed, and how this has impacted on the building of ties and common personhood within suburban spaces. In particular, the chapter explores the ways in which boundaries are created, literally, around individual freestanding houses in the suburbs. It looks, then, at the choices that are made in our most private of spaces – our homes – and how this impacts on the possibility of an organic form of social cohesion.

This essay is premised on the assumption that no common identity, sense of unity, or bonds of solidarity can be built as long as the way we design our living spaces is grounded in deep seated dispositions of distrust and fear. These hard wired

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1.(http://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2014-08-25-social-cohesion-nation-building-and-the-likelihood-of-success/).

sentiments and ways of thinking have led to home boundary designs in suburban spaces that conflict sharply with an environment that embraces dignity and equality across social divides. I chose to focus on suburban spaces because they are places of aspiration. The suburbs are places that people want to "get to" because they are viewed as an escape from the atomised and chaotic life of the inner city and they are seen to be a "step up" from township life. Suburbs are viewed, in ideal terms, as places of neighbourliness, privatised family life and leisure choices.[2] However, in South Africa, and indeed throughout the world, suburban house design and lifestyle choices can render these spaces as either *lost* or *found*,[3] as spaces of entrenched isolation or embedded connectivity. For the most part, South African suburbs are characterised by boundary designs meant to exclude and defend. In more affluent areas, in particular, high solid walls, with complicated technologies for gaining access sharply separate home and street. Core to these boundary formations is a fierce protection of privacy, property and *life*, which is contrary to any organic social cohesion project. The literal and figurative walls that suburban dwellers have created in South Africa generate (unintentionally) insecurity and isolation among suburban residents. Confronting walls also engenders fear, uncertainty and marginalisation amongst those *foreigners* entering the suburbs.

This essay focuses on the dominant routine practice of walling suburban homes. As the literature and every day experience indicate, walls are no guarantee of safety, and indeed may intensify feelings of insecurity and isolation as well as vulnerability to crime. Heavily walled environments impede social integration and bonding. Walls, then, can be more of a problem than a solution. It is this position that this chapter adopts, recognising that it is an outlier perspective. This sensibility is one that is shared, perhaps surprisingly, by policing actors (both public and private). Much of this chapter is based on the views that those involved in policing hold about walls and safety, and by implication, social cohesion. Their views are important not simply because they are key knowledge bearers of safety generation, but also because they come to know the social fabric of streets and neighbourhoods in their daily work. A marginal new discourse is emerging within the policing industry that suggests that visibility counts a great deal in crime prevention, in tandem with neighbours who are connected with one another's lives and safety, and where street and home are bonded. The aim of this chapter is not to provide "hard evidence" that walls are a liability in regard to the production of security and social cohesion. Rather, it aims to shift dominant thinking through providing a new lens through which to make sense of walls as literal and figurative constructs. It is hoped that this will generate new imaginings (and even dreams) of how suburban homes could be designed to better govern security while concurrently fostering neighbourhood and street-level social cohesion. And in so doing, provide an avenue for debating new ways of making Durban a more cogent and cohesive city.

2. Lupi, Musterd 2006, *passim.*

3. *Ibidem.*

Wall mania in South Africa

In most of today's South African suburbs, high walls and other hard-targeting "crime prevention" devices are viewed as non-negotiable in creating a sense of safety in a country that many view as plagued by crime.[4] According to Lemanski (2004), public concern with crime grew exponentially after 1994. While public opinion polls in 1994 indicated a very low level of concern with crime, by 1997, this had increased from 6% to 58%. In trying to make sense of this, Gordon (1998) concludes that while crime statistics did rise fairly dramatically post-1994, the increase in fear of crime was not proportional. Fear of transition, perhaps, was filtered into a tunnel of fear of crime, taking much the same form as a moral panic. This moral panic manifested itself in a quest for fortification as well as new forms of social engineering and social exclusion, all governed by fear of crime. As formal apartheid broke down, walls went up – real walls that physically separated people from one another and figurative walls that displaced the stranger even from social imagination. Houses without walls are now viewed as vulnerable to crime and intrusion, although evidence (and direct experience) may indicate the contrary. South African suburb dwellers are hardwired into the habit of building walls, and there appears to be little space to deliberate the possibility of "breaking down walls". An "architecture of fear"[5] has captured the suburban urban landscape, justified as a defensible response to crime and insecurity. And, perhaps expectedly, according to Lemanski (2004), surveys indicate that despite "excessive fortification" particularly amongst the more affluent, fear of crime has increased. Isolation has led to increasing fear of the other, which in turn has led to further fortification, a deepening of fear, and increasing social divides.

Singh (2008) sees walls not simply as there to prevent crime and intrusion, but also to punish possible *offenders*. Sharp pieces of glass, metal and electric wiring have been attached to walls ensuring that those who try to get over them are seriously harmed in the process. In addition, those who construct solid walls often attach video cameras to the walls, both as a means of *seeing* who is around and about private property, and also as evidence when crimes do take place. The lesson these high, punishing walls send to excluded persons is: "stay out or be hurt and implicated!".

While the construction of walls is legitimated by arguments around security governance, whether or not high walls and electrified fences do in fact reduce crime victimisation and targeting is up for debate. Walls as a means of *defence* for the wealthy has a history date back to middle ages where "inhabitants in cities were protected from outside danger by walls".[6] Wealthy suburb dwellers in a number of cities across the world, and at various points in history, have bought into the idea that walls act as a barrier to crime and insecurity and as a means of keeping *strangers* out.[7] Sao

4. Altbeker 2007, *passim*; Leggett 2003, *passim*; Singh 2008, *passim*; Samara 2010, *passim*; Steinberg 2008, *passim*.

5. Lemanski 2004, p. 101.

6. Midveit 2005, p. 11.

7. Merry 1993, *passim*; Low 1997, *passim*.

Paulo, for example, has described by Caldeira as “a city of walls”.[8] Similarly, Mike Davis graphically portrays the fortified wealthy suburbs of Los Angeles in the 1990s. According to him «the city bristles with malice”[9] because the “the defence of luxury has given birth to an arsenal of security systems and an obsession with policing the social boundaries through architecture”.[10] In these cities, and others, walls became a form of target-hardening, supposedly making (private) property physically harder to break into and raising the actual and perceived risk of detection by neighbours or police due to the increased noise created and expanded time spent attempting to break in. This *landscape* of suburban walls and private security patrols is legitimated by a discourse of fear of crime and violence. Urban fear has resulted in physical design structures intended to exclude unsavoury strangers that prowl their perimeters.[11] Who exactly the *stranger* is, is contextually determined, but almost always with a race, ethnic and/or class bias.[12] Residential apartheid, created by prejudice and socioeconomic inequality, is reinforced by design formulas, policing (private and public) technologies,[13] and media hype about urban crime.[14] Davis argues that the quest for exclusion has created a “dytopian vision”[15] where an obsession with safety obscures any other possible imaginings. High walls, solid gates and other barring technologies produce a landscape that encodes class relations and residential segregation along a number of lines including race, class, ethnicity and even gender.[16] The result of these technologies and mentalities is unbreakable cycles of isolation, disassociation and mistrust.[17] In this environment, vulnerability is augmented, resilience is trampled upon, and social ties are rebutted. Decontaminating private spaces of fear and uncertainty is not only impossible, it is a project with perilous consequences for those on either side of the wall.[18] In South Africa, as elsewhere, walls have created a dystopian *reality* far removed from the imaginary of a non-racial, desegregated and publicly engaged society. The architecture of South African suburban life has fostered «a hostile environment for the development of democratic imagination and participation».[19] This echoes the view of urban ethnographers and scholars who are part of the Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CEPTED) movement. Jane Jacobs (1969) is viewed as the architect of CEPTED thinking.

It was Jacobs who first made reference to keeping “eyes on the street”, a

8. Sennet 1996, p. 87.

9. Davis 1990, p. 154.

10. *Ibidem.*

11. Low 1997, *passim.*

12. Fainstein 2001, *passim.*

13. Low 1997, *passim.*

14. Flusty 1997, *passim.*

15. Davis 1990, p. 155.

16. Low 1997, *passim.*

17. Davis 1990, *passim*; Caldeira 1996, *passim.*

18. Bickford 2000, *passim.*

19. *Ivi*, p. 356.

concept later developed as "natural surveillance". CEPTED scholars maintain that walls – concrete and social – serve to increase fear and even the possibility of victimisation. For them, crime can be reduced or prevented through environmental design that allows for natural surveillance, natural access control and natural territorial reinforcement.[20] The underlying principal of crime prevention for CPTED scholars is that the higher the chances of being seen, the less likely the chances of being victimised.[21] World renowned (South African born) criminologist Stanley Cohen (1985), guided to some extent by the CEPTED scholars, writes that urban environments can be designed to reduce opportunities for crime or fear of crime, without resorting to building fortresses. For Cohen, low social integration invokes heightened fear of crime and insecurity. Creating islands of isolation and imposed order can have the exact opposite effect to what is intended by fortification. A number of studies have demonstrated that people who feel isolated generally feel more fearful and "out of control"[22] within the (sub)urban spaces that they have tried to contain and command. Sennett (1996) provides an interesting explanation for this. According to him, urban spaces are by definition somewhat chaotic and diverse. He argues that, as a result, as soon as we try to artificially control these spaces, our inability to do so reminds us of our vulnerability and incompetence. Put slightly differently, walls create a pacification of everyday life, leading to feelings of defencelessness and uncertainty.[23] The physical walls created to *defend* have the unintended consequence of leaving residents defenceless, with low level engagement with those around them and minimal natural surveillance.

Author's voice – the anti-wall disposition

The idea that high walls make us safer has always sat uncomfortably with me, both emotionally and intellectually. In my own personal life, I have made decisions about suburban dwelling which contrast with the almost common sense view that walls protect. In 2007, I decided to buy a house for myself and my two young children, then aged three and seven, to live in. I knew that I wanted a free standing house that felt safe and whose design allowed for a sense of connection to life beyond the inner realms of my home. I visited many suburbs looking at houses. In the end I made the decision to live in a suburb, called Umbilo that is diverse in its composition and where people walk and play on the streets. Before making this decision, I spoke with people who lived in the street where the house I hoped to buy was located. Everyone who lived on that street knew one another and when I took a drive into it in the evening, most of the front doors were open, allowing passers-by to peep into the privacy of individual homes. This inclusivity and openness in design was comforting.

20. Wenzel 2007, *passim.*

21. Gardner 1995, *passim.*

22. Box 1988, *passim.*

23. Midveit 2005, *passim.*

I chose a house in this street with a simple, waist level palisade fence around it, and with a veranda (a *stoep*) that looks directly onto the street, at street level. The lack of a wall increased my sense of connectivity to neighbours and to people who use the street, both familiars and strangers. Within me I believed that this connectedness, this visibility from inside and outside the house, was what would protect me and my children. A few days after I moved into my Umbilo house, my neighbour from across the road told me that he was aware that I was alone with two children in the house and that each night before he went to bed he would look into my house to see that everything was okay. Within a few weeks I knew almost every neighbour in my block by name, and the children that lived in the block would wander into one another's homes after school and on the weekends. I had found my suburb and my dream home. The suburb I chose to live in is thought of by many to be undesirable. In the greater Durban area it is commonly referred to as *Scumbilo*. Umbilo is viewed as somewhat unkempt place where ill-disciplined youth with low level aspirations dwell. There is a belief, "out there", that this is an unsafe suburb. Admittedly petty crime is a problem in Umbilo, and I, like others, have had washing stolen off my line and a cell phone stolen. But I have never been threatened with violence or had reason to feel insecure. On the one occasion when I did see a car idling for some time outside my house, I called a neighbour who told me just to let me know if anything untoward was happening and they would be there in an instant. Knowing this, and with my phone in hand, I opted to stand on my veranda and check out the car as the people in the car checked on me. I wanted to let them know that I was aware of their presence and that I was unafraid. I felt a huge sense of relief that I knew what was going on outside my house because I could see the street and its happenings. Eventually the car left, drove round the block and returned, as I suspected it might. I continued to stand my ground, to look out, to indicate my alertness to what was happening. My neighbour came past to see that everything was okay. The car drove off, and I felt protected. I have now lived in this house for ten years. I have never returned, and vindicated of connectedness to my neighbours and to people who walk the street has brought with it security. The visibility of my house from the street, and the street from my house plays a large role in making my home a safe haven. And while friends and family engage in the project of fortification in more affluent suburbs, I remain steadfast in my belief that my visibility and my connectivity is what keeps me safe and connected to my neighbours and people who make us of the street.

People from outside Umbilo who visit my home are often surprised by my lack of walls. They question my safety, and my wisdom in choosing to live as I do. There is, however, a significant social group that does not question my how I choose to live, and the way in which my house and boundary are designed. I refer here to those who are *do* policing, i.e., members of the public police and private security agencies. I learned this through engaging with these policing actors in conducting the research that is the basis of this chapter. I was keen to find out how those who police the suburbs (both private and public security providers) feel about walls. I knew their sentiments and perspectives derived from their own practical experience of policing the suburbs.

In the research that informs this essay, I decided to compare two suburbs, Umbilo and Westville. Umbilo is a working class suburb, largely without high walls. Westville is an affluent suburb and is heavily walled. The walls in Westville are high, often accompanied by electric fencing solid iron electronic gates. I forged partnerships with the South African Police Service (SAPS) in both the Umbilo and Westville stations and with the private security companies that are most present in these suburbs i.e. Blue Security (Umbilo) and ADT Security (Westville). The photos below provide a fairly good image of the difference between the two suburbs.
This house, situated in the heart of Umbilo, has no physical boundary at all. The street and the front patio are coupled; this allows for a flow of people and events from street to home. The house is *protected* by Blue Security. Interestingly, the Blue Security officer that we were driving with at the time that we passed by this particular house said that he did not recall ever being called to the house for a crime incident. SAPS incident reports reinforce this tacit knowledge.

While not all houses in Umbilo are as open as the one depicted in Photo 1 (Fig. 1), most have boundaries that allow for two way visibility and for engagement. The reasons for this boundary design are multiple: lack of funds to create fortifications, histories of connectedness with neighbours, and a vibrant daily street life which is valued with people walking from place to place and children playing in the roads.
In Westville, the streets are quieter, the residents are more affluent, and the walls are higher, and more impermeable than is the case in Umbilo. The house in Photo 2 (Fig. 2) is fairly typical of the boundary structure in the most affluent sections of Westville. The boundary suggests a need to conceal both life and property, and is a stark disconnection from the energy (minimal as it may be in this suburb) of the street.
The research was conducted through a series of interviews with key actors in the private security organisations. Informal group discussions were also held with members of the private security companies. But more importantly, perhaps, I joined the police and private security officers in patrols in each of these suburbs. I chatted while identifying houses that were more or less likely to be targeted by those with criminal intent. Wearing a bullet proof vest and having signed indemnity forms, I joined patrols during the day and at night. Being part of these patrols allowed me to see which houses were being targeted while we were on patrol and to chat to the relevant officers about their perspectives on house design and security and design. During these patrols both police and private security officers would point out houses that they felt were vulnerable to crime, especially violent crime, as well as which houses were easier or more difficult to police. The ride-alongs, interviews and informal conversations were conducted between February and June 2014.
The minute I explained the purpose of this research to officers and officials in the various policing agencies, great excitement was generated. As opposed to expected resistance to the research and the broader project of imagining a city without walls, those I met felt that fresh deliberations about home design, social connectivity and safety is well overdue. They expressed genuine interest in the research and in the dissemination of the results. The private security companies, in particular, immediately committed

to being partners in this research and action enterprise. Public and private police representatives were equally keen to have their *clients* thinking differently about how to secure themselves and their property. Company directors and station commissioners alike acted as facilitators, rather than as gate keepers, and officers on patrol were eager to have company "on the job" and to share their expert, bottom-up knowledge.

A policing view of walls, safety and connectivity

I was pleasantly surprised by my engagement with the public and private policing actors I met in the course of this research. What surprised me most was how aligned their thinking was to scholars who promote more humane, open and congenial suburban spaces and design practices. Almost all the policing actors spoke of the "myth of securitisation" created by high walls, usually combined with high technology devices for deterring and detecting *outsiders*. Brian Jackson, Reaction Manager of Blue Security, spoke of a "false sense of security" that South Africans create through fortressing their homes and adding unnecessary layers of defensive materials. Jackson believes that this "foolish mindset" is probably partly the result of ideas that were once promoted by the private security industry, particularly during the period of political transition.

Interestingly and for reasons that will become clear later in this chapter, proved to be the relatively *unwalled* suburb of Umbilo is far safer than the more heavily walled suburb of Westville. Where crime does occur in Umbilo, it is generally petty and opportunistic. Incident reports show that Westville has a far greater incidence of organised and serious crimes. While it is undeniable that "crime moves", this current reality stands in sharp contradiction to the generally held view that the working class, more chaotic and diverse suburb of Umbilo, is harder hit by crime.

On a patrol ride-along with Blue Security Patrol Manger, Lieutenant Syd, I was shown a number of heavily walled houses that had been targeted for more serious crimes, such as car hijacking or armed robbery. According to Lieutenant Syd, these houses that are most targeted, particularly by more organised criminals are those with high walls. This perspective was reinforced by Sunil Ramdayal, the Technical Manager of ADT Security, who stated that "serious criminals will always look for ways to be hidden from sight. High walls provide this and my sense is that it is behind high walls that more serious crimes take place". A related and equally interesting observation was made by Stephen Winborne, Head of Special Project at Blue Security. According to him high walls make people on the outside feel that they do not belong. They reinforce inequality and are experienced as confronting. In his view, it is highly possible that uncompromising outsiders physical barriers create disharmony, and if a home is to be targeted, it is likely to be one that *offenders* feel stigmatised and dehumanised by. Perhaps, he argued, shutting people out creates enmity that acts as an impetus to target walled houses in more violent ways. While private security representatives from both companies spoke about the importance of security technology such as beams, passives and even CCTV in optimising home security, they also placed considerable emphasis on natural surveillance and neighbourliness,

both of which are compromised by walls. For Martin Kriel, ADT Managing Director of the East Coast Region, the most important way to create personal and communal security is to "know your neighbours", and "build a sense of local community". According to Kriel, nothing, not even technology, can replace the value of people looking after one another and intervening immediately if a security threat arises. Embedded in what he was saying is the assumption that human bonds create and govern security and that bottom-up solidarity does matter when it comes to safety. The belief that solid, physical and defensive walls compromise safety because they create figurative walls was shared by Lieutenant Colonel Correa, Head of Visible Policing at SAPS Umbilo. During a ride-along, he shared something significant about his own personal home security system:

> "The first thing I did when I moved from Sydenham [a "coloured" township] into my house in Glenwood is break down the existing wall. I simply put up a transparent fence instead. The second thing I did is make a real effort to know my neighbours. I am a policeman, and I know what counts. Visibility, a good network of neighbours, and natural surveillance. Nothing can replace the importance of people in your neighbourhood, and feeling attached to the street you live on. Of course I have a dog and burglar bars, but what is most important is knowing the people around me, being friendly, and looking out for each other. Correa took us to see his house which indeed has nothing more than a palisade fence as a boundary, meant, according to him, to keep his children and pets off the street".

Correa's house demonstrates an openness to the street he lives in, rather than a need to close off and fortify. His house provides a powerful image, particularly because he is a high ranking police officer in the SAPS. For Correa, the design of a home boundary has to allow for natural surveillance and social engagement. The open view of his house not only allows him to see and engage with what is going on in his street, it also allows those on the outside to appreciate that his house is a place of "people flow". For Correa, this acts as a deterrent to those who want to invade without disruption or whose target is the more vulnerable i.e., women, the elderly and children. In addition, he believes his friendly and humane disposition have protected him from being targeted as a crime victim. Correa is not alone in this view (Fig. 3). Sunil Ramdayal, Blue Security Senior Technical Advisor, believes that South Africans are overly concerned with privacy at all costs. He maintains that if we are serious about safety, we would know that this comes from being "deeply involved and embedded in one another's lives", particularly those of our neighbours. Westville suburban dwellers, he stated, are more concerned with being able to wear bikinis at home without being seen than with making their houses safer through visibility and community ties. This, he believes, creates a sense of isolation which in itself is the greatest threat to safety and the biggest cause of fear of crime.

The idea of privacy trumping safety was made apparent on one of my visits to the Westville Police Station. On 12th of June 2014, while waiting to go on a ride-along, I heard that an armed robbery had just taken place in Westville. A family had been held up at gun point. In the midst of what was taking place in the police station I managed to chat briefly to the Acting Station Commissioner, Lieutenant Colonel Tommy Stewart, about the incident. I asked him if the house was by any chance walled. He replied that it was and that the high walled houses give the police the

"biggest headache". While, according to him, these are not the only houses to be targeted, they are targeted as much or even more than houses with open fencing, low walls or no walls. However, he noted, the added problem presented by walled houses is that police can neither see what is going on during patrols nor gain access when an incident is reported. This police view resonates with a survey conducted in the late 1990s of more than 30 station commissioners in the wider Johannesburg area. All 30 believed that walls make the fight against crime more difficult for the police.[24]
Shortly after the incident was reported, I went to the house that had been violently robbed with officers from ADT. Both the ADT officers and I were fascinated when the next door neighbour came to ask the ADT officer for the phone number of the house that had been attacked. The owner of the next door house had never met her neighbour despite living next door for a number of years. She had heard the gunshots but had not tried to intervene. She feared that her home might be attacked next and wanted to find out more about what had occurred. The armed robbery, it appeared, made her acutely aware of her alienation, and her vulnerability. In speaking to her it turned out that her high wall that was designed to protect her affluent lifestyle and property could produce the exact opposite result.

Policing actors are well aware that signifiers of wealth generate risk. While they do not talk of inequality as a problem, they are certainly aware of the fact that homes that are opulent and fortressed indicate that there is valuable *stuff* to be taken and reinforce embedded class divides. Discernible signifiers of inequality generate distrust and disconnection. It was therefore not surprising, but still interesting, to learn that the top management of both public and private police agencies (without exception) opted to live in *regular*, middle-low income areas. These areas, they believe, are less targeted than the wealthier areas and there is a greater sense of community. The suburbs they choose to live in typically have houses in very close proximity to one another as well as an active, integrated and diverse community. Both Kriel and Corea were adamant that they would not live in a more affluent area such as Westville or Durban North. Fences or barriers were seen as necessary, but mostly to keep pets and children within bounds. Such boundary structures should, they believe, be designed to allow people to see in and for those inside their homes to see out onto the street, making the street and home continuous with one another.

Designing in safety and social cohesion

While the security industry seems to be undergoing a rethink on the link between security and fortification, there is a lag in regard to the suburban clients they serve who cling to their fortressed existence and their privacy. Alternate home designs that allow for flow, visibility and connectivity are regarded as *risky* and suburban dwellers appear to be risk averse. Yet, in refusing to venture into alternate designs which have the potential to enhance both safety and connectivity, they increase the risk of being victimised and isolated. They also contribute directly to widespread

24. Rauch 1998, *passim.*

inequality and the shaming of those already marginalised. What home owners might view as innocuous home design produces real barriers to the type of organic bottom-up social cohesion that J. Brooks Spector speaks of. It is time to start imagining differently. The possibility exists to break down walls as perhaps the best way to create solidarity and enhance security (as both a private and public good). It is time to start thinking seriously about our dream homes and making these a reality. Asked what he would consider his “ideal home”, Brian Jackson of Blue Security stated the following:

> “At the end of the day walls are only there to keep people out, and why do we want to do that? That doesn’t seem to make sense because we don’t live in an island. I broke down the wall around my father’s home and I felt immediate freedom. Crime will still be there, it always will, but you will feel you are part of the community. Freedom is the most important thing in life. Having a city without walls would make our city look so much more beautiful and it would create much more linkages between people. It would mean that your relationship with people become more friendly and open, which has to be a good thing. I’d like to see no high walls. I would love to walk through my town. I think that would be beautiful. In order to be safe, we need to have openness. There need to be active public spaces with children on the road. At ten at night women should be walking on the streets without worrying about a risk element because they can see that there are other people out and about. We need to have well looked after parks with equipment. I would love to see people using the public space. The community needs to own their space. But people are too scared. We need to get some people to take the risk. And let’s go back to being simple. What does it prove to have a huge house and a huge yard and never feel really at home?”

A new mentality is emerging in the security industry that suggests that fortification through high solid walls is counter-productive, and indeed dangerous. Walls are viewed as overwhelming by policing agents, as criminogenic and as a policing nightmare. Suburban homeowners have designed out social cohesion in their quest for safety and privacy. Yet paradoxically, South African suburban dwellers hanker for suburbs abroad where walls do not exist and people walk freely on the streets. They are nostalgic for times gone by when their own family homes opened onto the streets and pavements. Despite this, seemingly ineffective and counterproductive prevention methods persist in South African suburban life, inhibiting bottom-up, organic processes of social cohesion that might in fact prove to be part of the solution to the problem of real and imagined crime. Change in home boundary design requires new deliberations, risk taking and dreaming on the part of suburb dwellers, city planners and policy makers. Lessons can be learned from American Latino suburbs and favellas where home and pavement are intertwined and where ordinary people mix with the stranger and the outcast so that ordinary behaviour drowns more deviant behaviour.

Durban can become a more cogent and coherent city if serious consideration is given to breaking down physical walls, and in so doing allow for connections between humans and indeed all living things that form part of the urban ecosystem.

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