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# The Effects of Private Walls on Relationships Across Class and Race in the New South Africa

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## **Abstract**

This thesis seeks to understand the intended and unintended effects of the proliferation of private walls around homes in South Africa, specifically in the context of apartheid and post-apartheid history. I argue that walls around private homes produce a variety of effects. Firstly, they visually, physically, and mentally separate individuals, resulting in decreased interactions between residents and passersby as well as between neighbors and greater ignorance between these groups. Secondly, walls preclude the formation of positive relationships between strangers of different classes and races, and they catalyze the formation of unequal relationships of power. This imbalance is compounded by existing economic and social inequality in contemporary South Africa. Thirdly, walls encourage the adoption of inherently oppositional identities based around status and security, resulting in the creation of Us/Them divisions between those on the inside and those on the outside.

## **Keywords**

South Africa, wall, gate, security fence, isolation, separation, apartheid, Marx, crime, relationship, identity, class, race, Social Sciences, Political Science, Anne Norton, Norton, Anne

## **Disciplines**

Other Political Science

# The Effects of Private Walls on Relationships Across Class and Race in the New South Africa

By Daniel Torrington

Dr. Anne Norton, Advisor

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirement for the  
Degree of Bachelor of Arts  
in Political Science with Distinction

The University of Pennsylvania  
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## Abstract

This thesis seeks to understand the intended and unintended effects of the proliferation of private walls around homes in South Africa, specifically in the context of apartheid and post-apartheid history. I argue that walls around private homes produce a variety of effects. Firstly, they visually, physically, and mentally separate individuals, resulting in decreased interactions between residents and passersby as well as between neighbors and greater ignorance between these groups. Secondly, walls preclude the formation of positive relationships between strangers of different classes and races, and they catalyze the formation of unequal relationships of power. This imbalance is compounded by existing economic and social inequality in contemporary South Africa. Thirdly, walls encourage the adoption of inherently oppositional identities based around status and security, resulting in the creation of Us/Them divisions between those on the inside and those on the outside.

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## **i. Preface**

During the five months that I lived and studied in Cape Town, South Africa, I made a habit of wandering down streets and exploring as many new places as I could by foot or bicycle. I had fallen in love with the beauty of Table Mountain, and when I wasn't hiking its trails I was walking or bicycling aimlessly through the neighborhoods surrounding the home where I lived with my wonderful homestay family. It was on these walks that I became aware of the presence of menacing walls around otherwise beautiful homes. It seemed that everywhere I went in Cape Town, homes were surrounded by barricades of stone and metal, and the eerie ticking sound of electricity surging through wires was ever present, reminding me that crossing the border between residents of these homes and myself would mean incredible physical pain. I grew uncomfortable in the knowledge that I could see no residents over their walls, and that I could only guess at their lives from a few disembodied sounds that carried over. Once I found myself so turned around on one of these walks that when I needed to ask for directions, I could find no one to ask for several blocks, when I at last came to a house without a wall and asked the man I met mowing his lawn.

On these walks I began to wonder why every home that could afford to have a wall seemed to have one, what it must be like to pass these walls every day as an outsider, and how many of those living inside their boundaries felt imprisoned, rather than protected, by them. These are the questions, formulated during meandering walks down streets beautiful but for their barricades, that I puzzled over long after I returned from Cape Town. With my limited experience of South Africa—though the country certainly won my heart and my head—I desired to answer these questions and more. With this curiosity and the encouragement of my wonderful advisors, family, friends, and girlfriend, I turned to the task of understanding what these walls

mean. Each question has led to several more, and along the way I discovered that there is much more to be said than I could possibly say in these pages. However, I hope I have here shed the smallest glimpse of fresh light on this subject, for it is one that deserves much more attention and discussion than it seems to have gotten.

## **ii. Acknowledgments**

I would like to thank Dr. Anne Norton for believing in my work and in me when I had my fair share of doubts; Dr. Eileen Doherty-Sil for her relentless support of all her students; my mother and my family for teaching me to always push myself to follow my passions; and my South African homestay parents, Lynne Roscoe and Godfrey Hendrickse, for opening their home and their hearts to me during my time in Cape Town. Finally, I must thank the love of my life, Lane Robinson, for being more than I could ever ask for in another human being. Thank you.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

*The setting of boundaries is always a political act.  
Boundaries determine membership:  
someone must be inside and someone outside.<sup>1</sup>*

-Edward J. Blakely and Mary Gail Snyder, *Fortress America*

*Contemporary political life is characterized  
neither by the exchange of ideas, nor by the communication  
of intentions between speaking subjects.  
Rather, it is characterized by the microcultural dynamics  
of interface through and by which subjects and objects cast appearances.  
The economy of and interface with appearances is a principal feature  
of contemporary political life.<sup>2</sup>*

-Davide Panagia, *Ten Theses for an Aesthetics of Politics*

Today, there is a proliferation of walls and fences around private residences in middle and upper class South African neighborhoods, which Wendy Brown refers to as a “complex internal maze of walls.”<sup>3</sup> Walking through such neighborhoods across the country, one is surprised to find a home or business that does not have some barrier surrounding it. Made of concrete and often topped with broken glass or electric wire, these barriers have almost completely permeated upper and middle class South African society. The existence of these walls raises a number of questions: *What intended and unintended consequences do these walls have on the political character of South Africa? On interactions between individuals of different socioeconomic classes and races? On the formation of relationships and identities across these sectors of society? In a nation that has desperately sought reconciliation of different races and*

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<sup>1</sup> Edward J. Blakely and Mary Gail Snyder, *Fortress America: Gated Communities in the United States* (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1997), 1.

<sup>2</sup> Davide Panagia, “Ten Theses for an Aesthetics of Politics (Proposal for the Association for Political Theory annual conference to be held at the University of Notre Dame on October 13-15, 2011),” *Ten Theses for an Aesthetics of Politics*. Academia.edu, [http://www.academia.edu/426360/Ten\\_Theses\\_for\\_an\\_Aesthetics\\_of\\_Politics](http://www.academia.edu/426360/Ten_Theses_for_an_Aesthetics_of_Politics), 3.

<sup>3</sup> Wendy Brown, *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty* (Brooklyn: Zone Books, 2010), 8.

*classes and the closing of egregious economic inequality in the decades following apartheid, how do these remaining barriers affect the achievement of such desired healing in South African society? In what ways do these walls constitute a de-institutionalized continuation of the apartheid project of separation? Is it possible for a true mingling of races and classes to occur when such conspicuous barriers exist? What would happen if these walls were suddenly, comprehensively, dismantled?* Though much has been written about gated communities and national border barriers within South Africa and other countries and the effects of these physical barriers on identities and the formation of relationships, relatively little has yet been written about walls around individual private residences and their political and societal effects. This thesis thus seeks to answer the previous questions by exploring the phenomenon of physical barriers around individual private residences in South Africa.

### **1a. Analyzing Walls' Effects**

The approach used here to analyze the political effects of private walls is influenced by Karl Marx's analysis of the intended and unintended effects of a factory, or any given institution, on society. Marx argues that a factory, or any institution within society, does not simply produce the intended good or effect but instead produces three things: 1) the intended good or effect, 2) a set of relationships inside and outside the institution that tend toward hierarchy or equality, and 3) a consciousness in those individuals who interact through the institution. I would argue that this framework is a useful way to analyze the effects of walls around private residences in South Africa: these walls do more than to simply physically separate individuals on the inside from those on the outside. On the most basic level, separation and security are their purpose: six to twelve feet high, often topped with broken glass or ticking electric wire, these walls succeed as physical and visual barriers between those within and those without. On a second level, they also



give rise to the unequal distribution of power across relationships formed in their presence, which is then mapped onto other spheres of society where the physical walls are not present. I argue, as others have argued, that physical barriers inhibit everyday interactions that can make possible the formation of meaningful positive relationships between strangers of different backgrounds. In place of these relationships, it seems that walls catalyze the formation of negative relationships characterized by fear and distrust from those inside and frustration from those outside who resent being considered threats to security. Lastly, these walls encourage the adoption of mutually exclusive identities between those on the “inside” and those on the “outside,” which are constructed around notions of status and security.<sup>4</sup>

To analyze the political effects of private walls in South Africa, this paper relies on several developed bodies of literature. Writings on gated communities serve as evidence of social tensions and hierarchical relationships surrounding the creation of physical barriers within societies. Literature on the impact of borders and boundaries on identity formation is used to understand the ways in which individuals conceptualize themselves in relation to others and how specific physical circumstances lead to different types of identity formation. Throughout, South African sociopolitical history is used to ground this discussion in the context of apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa to better understand the direct effects of walls within a society still struggling with reconciliation and widespread inequality two decades after the official end of institutionalized apartheid.

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<sup>4</sup> Put another way, in the presence of walls individuals are interpellated as “insiders” or “outsiders.” For a discussion of interpellation, see Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” (specifically the section titled “Ideology Interpellates Individuals as Subjects”) in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*.

### **1b. Thesis Structure**

This paper thus analyzes the political effects of physical walls around homes in South Africa in the following ways: chapter 2 reviews the literature on private walls and gated communities; chapter 3 describes the physical reality of walls in South Africa; chapter 4 provides an overview of apartheid history as a backdrop against which to understand contemporary political and economic realities; chapters 5-7 analyze the intended and unintended effects of walls on separation (5), relationship formation (6), and identity creation (7); and chapter 8 concludes with additional considerations, directions of further study, and the implications of walls within the context of post-apartheid South Africa.

## **2. NATIONAL, COMMUNITY, AND HOUSEHOLD WALLS**

### **2a. Three Levels of Analysis**

There can be said to be three primary levels of walls within a given society: the national, the community, and the private. The first two of these levels have been well described and analyzed, through literature on national borders and border identities and literature on the rise of gated communities. Within these literatures the intended and unintended political, social, and economic effects of these walls have been documented and examined. Yet the most intimate and private of these three levels of walls—those around individual homes—has not received the same scholarly attention afforded the previous two categories. While some philosophical observation has been devoted to exploring the walled household,<sup>5</sup> there have been few attempts to analyze the various consequences a proliferation of walls around private homes can have on a given society. Briefly examining the existing literature on walls at the community level will provide a template for the type of analysis that needs to be applied to the understanding of private walls. Existing literature on national borders and boundaries will be examined later, during the discussion of the influence of walls on the formation of identities.

### **2b. The State of Literature on Community Walls**

The rise of gated communities, especially within South Africa and the United States, has received much scholarly attention since the 1990s. Scholars have argued that there exist distinct categories of gated communities, based on the initial motivations behind their creation and the defining characteristics of these communities. Edward Blakely and Mary Gail Snyder, in one of the first nationwide studies of gated communities in the United States, classify these

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<sup>5</sup> See Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*.

communities into three categories: 1) Lifestyle communities, including golf resorts and retirement communities, in which leisure activities and amenities are separated and protected from the public by gates and other security measures; 2) Elite communities, in which residents seek higher social status through their inclusion in protected and separated communities; and 3) Security Zone communities, where residents seek protection and security out of fear of crime and of outsiders.<sup>6</sup>

Along with the motivations for joining gated communities, the effects of the rise of gated communities on social relations have also been thoroughly studied. Many scholars believe that increased gating of communities represents a withdrawal of social groups from larger society, one that may have widespread implications. Rowland Atkinson and Sarah Blandy, in the introduction to their recent volume on the subject, argue that “the internal contract of [gated communities] represents a threat to what might be thought of as a spatial contract between neighbourhoods of differing social characteristics.”<sup>7</sup> Blakely and Snyder, as well as Atkinson and Blandy, represent scholars from across such diverse fields as Sociology, Anthropology, Political Science, Urban/City Planning, Architecture, Community Development, and Geography who have analyzed and deconstructed the phenomenon of gated communities to understand the motivations and implications of this form of societal separation. The body of literature on this subject is dense and continually growing. And yet, for all the discussion of gated communities, there has been little written about the proliferation and impact of walls around private homes. Though this phenomenon seems closely related to the rise of gated communities, I would argue this is a distinctly individual form of societal exclusion that requires analysis separate from the body of literature on gated communities.

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<sup>6</sup> Blakely and Snyder, 53.

<sup>7</sup> Rowland Atkinson and Sarah Blandy, "Introduction: International Perspectives on the New Enclavism and The Rise of Gated Communities," in *Gated Communities* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2006), xv.

## **2c. How Private Residence Walls Differ from Gated Communities**

To understand the need for a separate discussion of private walls, it is helpful to first understand the distinction between gated communities and private walls around individual homes. Atkinson and Blandy define gated communities as “walled or fenced housing developments, to which public access is restricted, characterized by legal agreements which tie residents to a common code of conduct and (usually) collective responsibility for management.”<sup>8</sup> The walls discussed in this paper, on the other hand, separate individual homes from each other and from the public; they are not connected to one another or part of larger housing developments. Whereas gated communities exist as collective entities separate from larger society, walled private homes exist as individual plots of land separate from society. While gated communities might be walled off by one exterior wall, walled individual homes each present their own wall to exclude outsiders from access. In many cases, especially in Lifestyle or Elite communities, gated communities are also physically removed from areas frequented by individuals not living within these communities. The more physically removed they are from excluded passersby, the more easily gated communities can be ignored by those on the outside. Private walls around individual homes, however, present conspicuous and continuous evidence of their project of separation and exclusion to any individual who walks down streets where they exist. It is much harder to ignore or forget the dozens of walls one walks past every day on a commute through neighborhoods with individual walls around homes than it is to forget the one wall surrounding a given gated community, particularly if that community is set apart from busy traffic corridors, as Lifestyle and Elite communities often are.

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<sup>8</sup> Atkinson and Blandy, "Introduction," *Gated Communities*, viii.

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Given these differences in the presence and conspicuousness of walls to outsiders, it is imperative that the proliferation of private walls around individual homes be studied with the same rigor afforded the discussion of gated communities.

### 3. DESCRIPTION OF WALLS

#### 3a. Walls and Fences

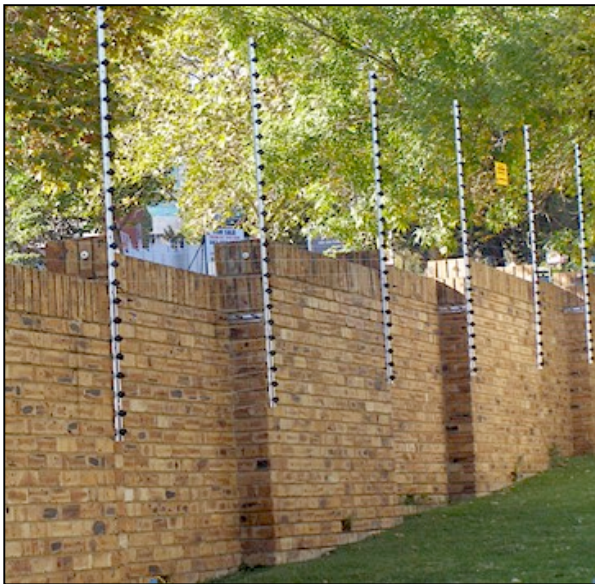
Before describing the types of walls around South African homes, it is necessary to make a distinction between “walls” and “fences.” Though they are often used interchangeably in discussions of boundaries around private property, these terms denote two distinct types of barriers. The main points of distinction between them are their material of construction and the degree to which they physically and visually separate areas and individuals. For the sake of consistency, this discussion will use the Oxford American Dictionary’s definitions of “walls” and “fences.” A fence, as defined by the Oxford American Dictionary, is “a barrier, railing, or other upright structure, *typically of wood or wire*, enclosing an area of ground to mark a boundary, control access, or prevent escape”<sup>9</sup> (emphasis mine). A wall, on the other hand, is defined as “*a continuous vertical brick or stone structure* that encloses or divides an area of land”<sup>10</sup> (emphasis mine). Whereas fences may be made of overlapping materials, such as chain links or wooden slats, with empty spaces in between, walls are typically continuous and unbroken in their construction. The effects of this distinction are twofold. Firstly, because of their sturdier material and unbroken construction, walls are typically more effective at physically keeping out individuals, since it is considerably more difficult to break through a brick or stone wall than it is to slip through or dislodge a wood or wire fence. Secondly, while it is often possible to see through fences due to their gaps, walls, unless defective, typically cannot be seen through. Therefore fences, to whatever degree they are successful, prevent individuals from physically crossing boundaries, whereas walls also prevent individuals from seeing past their boundaries.

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<sup>9</sup> *New Oxford American Dictionary*, 2nd ed., s.v. “fence”

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, “wall”

To label a continuous brick or stone structure a “fence” is to substitute a euphemism, and doing so subtly underemphasizes the physical and visual imposition of this structure. Wendy Brown, describing the wall separating Israel from Palestine, observes that an Israeli public relations document titled “Saving Lives—Israel’s Anti-Terrorist Fence: Answers to Questions,” produced in response to criticisms of the wall, stresses emphatically that the barrier is a *fence*, not a *wall*, using euphemism to downplay the intensity and severity of this wall.<sup>11</sup> Within this discussion the term “wall” shall refer to an unbroken structure of brick, stone, or concrete that, due to its height and/or other added security features, imposes a significant physical and visual separation.<sup>12</sup> The term “fence” shall refer to a structure of metal, wood, wire, or plastic that encloses or separates a distinct area from other areas but which imposes a lesser degree of physical or visual separation than a “wall.”



*As a wall, this barrier features physical and visual separation of either side*

Source:

[http://www.gido.co.za/pages/el\\_good\\_bad\\_fencing.htm](http://www.gido.co.za/pages/el_good_bad_fencing.htm)



*As a fence, this barrier only physically separates, since it can be seen through*

Source:

<http://www.jvasecurity.co.za/?mid=70&mid2=310>, page 19

<sup>11</sup> Brown, *Walled States*, 121.

<sup>12</sup> I am making an additional distinction here between low-rising walls that are easily seen over or crossed, such as those that might surround a garden, and tall walls that serve as physical and visual barriers. This paper is concerned with the latter category of walls.



### 3b. The Characteristic Wall

Walls and fences around South African homes come in many shapes and sizes. Their features vary widely, based on specifications such as height, thickness, material of construction, degree of visual separation, existence and form of additional security features, and decoration. However, it is helpful here to describe the characteristic wall that can be seen on middle and upper income streets across the country. This characteristic wall is one made of concrete or stone, rising between six and twelve feet high, likely topped with shards of broken glass, razor wire, or multiple strands of electric wire. This wall runs continuously around the house or yard, and if it is possible to see through this barrier at all, it is only through small decorative spaces cut out at intervals or through an imposing automated iron or steel fence at the driveway, also topped with electric or razor wire. Otherwise the wall presents an unbroken visual and physical barrier

between the sidewalk on the one side and the yard or house on the other. If topped with electric wire, it is likely that the wall gives

off a continuous ticking sound audible from the sidewalk as electricity surges through the metal wires. Electric wire is also accompanied by a warning sign, which usually contains the word

“DANGER,” often accompanied by the words “GEVAAR” and “INGOZI,” the Afrikaans and Xhosa words for “danger,” respectively.



*A typical warning sign accompanying an electric wire topped fence, reading "Danger" in English, Afrikaans, and Xhosa, respectively*

Source:

[http://image.shutterstock.com/display\\_pic\\_with\\_logo/257794/257794,1238669934,1/stock-photo-a-bright-yellow-electric-security-fence-warning-sign-posted-in-three-languages-english-afrikaans-27792838.jpg](http://image.shutterstock.com/display_pic_with_logo/257794/257794,1238669934,1/stock-photo-a-bright-yellow-electric-security-fence-warning-sign-posted-in-three-languages-english-afrikaans-27792838.jpg)



*A typical concrete wall topped with multiple rows of electric wire*

Source: <http://durban.olx.co.za/electric-fencing-free-standing-and-wall-top-secure-your-home-iid-376527917>



*A close-up of rows of electric wire atop a concrete wall*

Source: <http://www.securitycctv.co.za/electric-fences-fencing.html>

## 4. THE CONTEXT OF SOUTH AFRICAN APARTHEID

### 4a. Overview

To understand the full significance of walls in contemporary South Africa, the country's complex sociopolitical history of apartheid must be appreciated. Though the word has since been used in many contexts to mean many things,<sup>13</sup> *apartheid* was a specific policy direction of the South African government that was officially implemented by Prime Minister D. F. Malan and his National Party when they came to power in the national elections of 1948. The core of apartheid policies comprised acts of legislation that—based on government defined racial classifications—regulated and restricted such far-reaching sectors of public and private life as where individuals could live, whether or not they could vote, with whom they could have sexual relationships, and where their remains could be buried when they died.

These policies of institutional, government-enforced racial discrimination were expanded and solidified by Prime Minister H. F. Verwoerd from his election in 1958 until his assassination in 1966. Following his assassination, the National Party undertook minor reforms in response to growing domestic and international outrage at the actions of the white minority government that had been fortifying its control of the non-white majority of South Africans. Domestic resistance and international pressure came to a head during the 1980s with the massacres of resisters at the hands of South African military and police and the implementation of international sanctions by other countries. In response, the national government repealed many acts of apartheid legislation, though racial domination continued. It was not until 1994 that the formal legal structure of apartheid and government-led, institutional racism were dismantled following the first free

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<sup>13</sup> Elizabeth Landis, referring to its legal structure and various political articulations in 1961, aptly called it an “exceptionally fuzzy term,” which has only become truer in the subsequent fifty years (see Elizabeth S. Landis, “South African Apartheid Legislation I: Fundamental Structure,” *The Yale Law Journal* 71, no. 1 (1961): 3)

national elections open to every South African citizen regardless of race, class, or other discriminations.

Before apartheid was ended, some 3.5 million South Africans had been forcibly removed from their homes in “white-only areas” and “resettled” to slums lacking clean water, electricity, and private toilets; millions more were arrested and prosecuted under apartheid legislation criminalizing the fulfillment of basic human rights; and institutionalized racism had deprived persons of color across the nation of the economic, social, and political opportunities afforded their white peers, the effects of which are still felt today.<sup>14</sup>

#### **4b. “Separate Development” in Discourse and Practice**

It is helpful to begin understanding apartheid by examining the stated intentions of its architects when they first introduced it as a government policy direction and to compare this with its brutal realities. Though racial discrimination in South Africa had existed since the arrival of Dutch and other European settlers at the Cape of Good Hope in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and its gradual intensification was an important precedent to later racial policies, the government of D. F. Malan’s National Party was the first to introduce the word *apartheid* into political vocabulary. In a platform statement by the National Party in 1948 prior to the national elections, the Party introduced the term *apartheid*, which means apartness or separateness in Afrikaans, as a specific set of policy decisions based on racial separation. In this statement the Party identified two possible paths for South Africa to take concerning racial policies: the first a policy of equality and eventual enfranchisement of all races, and the second a policy of racial separation. According to the statement, racial equality, if pursued, would have resulted in “national suicide

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<sup>14</sup> Louise van Niekerk, ed., “History,” *South Africa Yearbook 2011/2012*, South African Government Communication and Information System, <http://www.gcis.gov.za/content/resourcecentre/sa-info/yearbook2011-12>.

for the White race,” and thus, the government chose to pursue a policy of apartheid, which the Party then defined as racial separation to protect whites while developing all races:

Its aim is the maintenance and protection of the European population of the country as a pure White race, the maintenance and protection of the indigenous racial groups as *separate* communities, with prospects of *developing* into self-supporting communities within their own areas...with full opportunities for *development* and self-maintenance in their own ideas, without the interests of one clashing with the interests of the other, and without one regarding the *development* of the other as undermining or a threat to himself.<sup>15</sup> (emphasis mine)

The language used here to introduce and define apartheid, as emphasized, is firmly rooted in the idea of “separate development,” under which the Party claimed all races would be given the opportunity to develop to the best of their abilities, in isolation from other races.

However, the desired national policies set out in this first conceptualization of apartheid focus much more heavily on the first part of this definition, that is the *separation* of races, than on measures to encourage the active *development* of non-white races. This emphasis illustrates the reality that apartheid legislation, though in name dedicated to the development of all races to the best of their abilities, was in actuality concerned only with the separation of races and the preservation of white minority dominance over the non-white majority.

#### **4c. Racial Segregation and Discrimination Under Apartheid**

The racial separation and discrimination at the center of apartheid relied on the classification of individuals into three government-created racial categories. The Population Registration Act of 1950, which required that all South Africans be classified according to race, established these classifications in legislation. These racial categories, along which later legislation discriminated rights, were: “Europeans” (sometimes later referred to as “Whites”),

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<sup>15</sup> The National Party of South Africa, “Statement by the National Party of South Africa, March 29, 1948,” *Modern History Sourcebook: The National Party’s Colour Policy, 1948*. Fordham University, <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1948apartheid1.asp>.

“Natives” (also “Blacks” or “Africans”), and “Coloureds” (considered of mixed black and white heritage or other non-white heritage).<sup>16</sup> As constructed by the national government, these three racial categories were inherently unequal and existed in a rigid hierarchy that was reflected in separate policies and privileges for each. Under subsequent legislation, Whites were afforded full political, social, and economic rights; Coloureds were granted a “middle position,” privileged among non-Europeans yet stripped of many rights; and Blacks were, through legislation introduced and adapted from the 1950s until the 1980s, comprehensively stripped of even the most basic human rights.<sup>17</sup>

Legislation passed under the apartheid government to deny rights to non-whites was horrifyingly efficient in its extension into every facet of life. The full body of apartheid legislation was not introduced simultaneously but rather was put into place piece by piece over the course of three decades. Between 1949 and 1951, the National Party government enacted apartheid legislation that prohibited marriage and extra-marital sex between whites and non-whites (thus criminalizing sex between whites and non-whites), began the forced removals of non-whites from their homes in areas deemed “white-only areas,” criminalized black workers who performed skilled work in undesignated urban areas, removed the right to vote from all Coloured persons, and designated black “homelands” (or “Bantustans”) in which government-defined racial and ethnic groups were to live.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> The Republic of South Africa, “Population Registration Act of 1950,” Digital Imaging South Africa, [http://www.disa.ukzn.ac.za/index.php?option=com\\_displaydc&recordID=leg19500707.028.020.030.pdf](http://www.disa.ukzn.ac.za/index.php?option=com_displaydc&recordID=leg19500707.028.020.030.pdf), page 279.

<sup>17</sup> National Party, “Statement”

<sup>18</sup> These acts were the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act of 1949, the Immorality Amendment Act of 1950, the Group Areas Act of 1950, the Bantu Building Workers Act of 1951, the Separate Representation of Voters Act of 1951, and the Bantu Authorities Act of 1951, respectively. See <http://www.sahistory.org.za/politics-and-society/apartheid-legislation-1850s-1970s> for brief descriptions of the provisions of these acts and [http://www.disa.ukzn.ac.za/index.php?option=com\\_browse&rid=leg](http://www.disa.ukzn.ac.za/index.php?option=com_browse&rid=leg) for digital copies of the full texts of these pieces of legislation.

By 1953, acts had been passed that forced blacks to carry passes at all times, prohibited strikes by black workers, established a curriculum body to create an education system for blacks that would restrict their educational and occupational opportunities, and established the institutionalized segregation of public amenities<sup>19</sup> with the explicit provision that non-white amenities need not be “of the same character, standard, extent or quality” as those designated for white persons.<sup>20</sup> In the period following these acts, the apartheid government passed several pieces of legislation restricting the ability of non-whites to resist oppression. This took the form of legislation prohibiting blacks from appealing their forced removal in any court and prohibiting black students from attending universities with white students, which ensured a lesser quality of education and a greater level



*An example of the type of pass that all black South Africans were required to carry under the Natives (Abolition of Passes and Co-ordination of Documents) Act of 1952*

Source:

[http://www.dadalos.org/int/Menschenrechte/grundkurs\\_mr5/Apartheid/apartheid/bestandteile/homelands.htm](http://www.dadalos.org/int/Menschenrechte/grundkurs_mr5/Apartheid/apartheid/bestandteile/homelands.htm)



*An apartheid era sign designating public space for whites only, legalized under the Reservation of Separate Amenities Act of 1953*

Source: <http://murraymcgregor.wordpress.com/chapter-14-the-birth-of-apartheid/>

<sup>19</sup> These acts were the Natives (Abolition of Passes and Co-ordination of Documents) Act of 1952, the Natives Labour (Settlement of Disputes) Act of 1953, the Bantu Education Act of 1953, and the Reservation of Separate Amenities Act of 1953, respectively.

<sup>20</sup> The Republic of South Africa, “Reservation of Separate Amenities Act of 1953,” Digital Imaging South Africa, [http://www.disa.ukzn.ac.za/index.php?option=com\\_displaydc&recordID=leg19531009.028.020.049.pdf](http://www.disa.ukzn.ac.za/index.php?option=com_displaydc&recordID=leg19531009.028.020.049.pdf), page 330.

of separation between whites and non-whites.<sup>21</sup> By 1959, the apartheid government had solidified its control over nearly every aspect of public and private life for non-whites.

In response to international criticism during the 1950s amid the wave of decolonization movements sweeping the colonized world, the South African government sought to reframe its apartheid policies not as directed toward racial discrimination but as aimed at the development of different groups in preparation for their eventual “independence” and “self-government.” Thus the apartheid government put into place wide reaching legislation that ostensibly sought to comply with demands from international critics of apartheid but which in reality aimed to limit the ability of non-whites to resist the government’s authority. The government accomplished this by separating blacks into eight government defined “ethnic” groups—to substitute ethnicity for race, attempting to mask the racism of apartheid through euphemism— which were supposedly sovereign and self-governed by the authority of ethnic representatives.<sup>22</sup> However, as Nelson Mandela notes in his critique of this policy of “tribalism” by Prime Minister Verwoerd, these ethnic groupings were artificial, governed by chiefs who were puppets of the National Party, and entirely unsustainable in an increasingly industrial society.<sup>23</sup> By separating blacks into these categories, pitting them against each other for resources and government favor, and paying lip service to global calls for self-government, Verwoerd made unified domestic resistance to racist

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<sup>21</sup> These acts were the Natives (Prohibition of Interdicts) Act of 1956 and the Extension of University Education Act of 1959.

<sup>22</sup> This was enacted under the Promotion of Bantu Self-Government Act of 1959.

<sup>23</sup> The following critique by Mandela of Verwoerd’s Bantustan and Homelands policies attacks their divisive and backward nature: “There was a time when, like all peoples on earth, Africans conducted their simple communities through chiefs, advised by tribal councils and mass meetings of the people. In those times the chiefs were indeed representative governors. Nowhere, however, have such institutions survived the complexities of modern industrial civilization. Moreover, in South Africa we all know full well that no chief can retain his post unless he submits to Verwoerd, and many chiefs who sought the interest of their people before position and self-advancement have, like President Lutuli, been deposed. Thus, the proposed Bantu authorities will not be, in any sense of the term, representative or democratic.” Nelson Mandela, “Verwoerd’s Tribalism,” in *No Easy Walk to Freedom* (Oxford: Heinemann Educational Publishers, 1965), 71.



government brutality increasingly difficult while on the surface responding to international demands for the end of apartheid.

The 1960s saw the growth of domestic unrest at a new rate, with massive protests and riots met with increasing police violence and detention of resisters. In March 1960, police opened fire on an anti-pass demonstration of some 5,000 unarmed black South Africans at Sharpeville, a township in the northeastern province of Gauteng, killing 69 people and seriously wounding 180, many of whom were shot in the back as they fled a police force of 300, some fortified in armored vehicles and air force fighter jets.<sup>24</sup> Protests and demonstrations by thousands of South Africans spread across the country in response to news of the Sharpeville massacre, and the government declared a state of emergency, granting itself the power to detain citizens without trial.

Legislation passed during the 1960s shows a desperate attempt to crush resistance and regain control over the activities of the non-white majority. The government did this by granting itself the power to declare opposition organizations and individuals first unlawful (in 1960), then agents of sabotage or terrorism (in 1962).<sup>25</sup> With these declarations against those unfriendly to the government, the government gave itself first the authority to prohibit individuals from gathering, and then, in 1965, to detain individuals for 180 days for the purposes of interrogation or to immediately order them to six months in solitary confinement, with no visits permitted other than those by state officials.<sup>26</sup> Acts of detainment, under this law, could not be reviewed by any court in the country or appealed by any person.

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<sup>24</sup> South Africa History Online, "Sharpeville Massacre, 21 March 1960," *South Africa History Online*, <http://www.sahistory.org.za/topic/sharpeville-massacre-21-march-1960>.

<sup>25</sup> These acts were the Unlawful Organisations Act of 1960, the General Law Amendment Act (Sabotage Act) of 1962, and the Terrorism Act of 1962, respectively.

<sup>26</sup> These powers of detainment were granted under the Criminal Procedure Amendment Act of 1965.

At the same time that the government was increasing its powers to oppress, resistance organizations were growing in strength and conviction. During this period the African National Congress (ANC, the prevailing black resistance organization during apartheid and the ruling political party since 1994) abandoned its policy of peaceful resistance. In place of this policy, the ANC created Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK, “Spear of the Nation”), a militant wing with which it worked to “make apartheid unworkable and [the] country ungovernable” through acts of violence aimed at sabotaging government infrastructure.<sup>27</sup> Shortly thereafter, in 1963, a number of top ANC leaders, including Nelson Mandela, were arrested and, following the Rivonia Trial, were convicted of sabotage and sentenced to life in prison.

Domestic unrest and violent repression continued during this time, and in 1976 unrest again exploded with the police shootings of hundreds of schoolchildren during a protest at the Soweto township near Johannesburg, sparking riots across the country. In the mid 1980s, domestic and international resistance reached the boiling point, as student protests set off declarations of states of emergency and international sanctions and boycotts tightened around the South African government. In a desperate response to these pressures, the government began repealing pieces of apartheid legislation, seen in the desegregation of public facilities and the release of many ANC members. In 1990, newly elected President F.W. de Klerk announced the release of Nelson Mandela and other resistance leaders from prison, as well as the unbanning of resistance movements. Between this time and the first democratic free elections that saw Nelson Mandela elected president in 1994, the last pieces of apartheid legislation were challenged and repealed.

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<sup>27</sup> South Africa History Online, “uMkhonto weSizwe (MK),” *South Africa History Online*, <http://www.sahistory.org.za/topic/umkhonto-wesizwe-mk>.

#### **4d. Post-Apartheid South Africa: Understanding Post-ness and Newness**

South Africa in the period since 1994 has been termed many things, including “post-apartheid” and the “New South Africa.” Dreams of a South African society of racial harmony and economic equality have been expressed in myriad ways, from the vision of a “Rainbow Nation” vibrant and whole in its diversity to the concept of *ubuntu*, a sense of community, harmony, and universality expressed in the Xhosa and Zulu languages.<sup>28</sup> There have certainly been many new aspects of South Africa since 1994 aimed at healing the wounds of apartheid, including the adoption of a new flag and national anthem in three languages; a new constitution in 1996 outlawing discrimination in its many forms; the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) begun in that same year led by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, which heard evidence from more than 19,000 victims of apartheid human rights violations and promised reparations of millions of dollars; and black economic empowerment programs that encouraged international actors to work with black entrepreneurs.<sup>29</sup> However, claims of newness and post-ness are inherently problematic, as such descriptions risk overemphasizing the degree to which a state has overcome or changed from its previous condition. With the application of titles such as “new” and “post-”, it is important to remember that no current or future government policy will ever undo the damage of apartheid. The conditions of those living in South Africa today are evidence that the legacy of apartheid lives on, influencing economic, social, and political opportunities and informing contemporary conceptualizations of race, class, and status.

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<sup>28</sup> The term “Rainbow Nation” is generally attributed to sermons of racial harmony and equality by Archbishop Desmond Tutu and later to usage by Nelson Mandela and others to describe South Africa’s racial and social aspirations after the end of apartheid.

<sup>29</sup> Berger, Iris. *South Africa in World History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 155.

Wendy Brown, writing of the prefix “post,” aptly points out that this prefix defines temporal distance from an event or era and not the existence of a current condition opposite to that which preceded it:

The prefix ‘post’ signifies a formation that is *temporally after but not over* that to which it is affixed. ‘Post’ indicates a very particular condition of afterness in which what is past is not left behind, but, on the contrary, relentlessly conditions, even dominates a present that nevertheless also breaks in some way with this past.<sup>30</sup>

It is through Brown’s understanding of the prefix “post” that post-apartheid South Africa is best described: it is a nation that has distanced itself temporally from the atrocities of apartheid yet which continues to be impacted by its legacy. This legacy is evidenced by egregious economic and social inequality, the conditions of millions of black South Africans with unmet basic human needs who live on resource-barren land in shacks built during apartheid, and racial divisions supported by institutionalized racial privilege and longstanding racial hostility and animosity. As it pertains to walls, there also exists a concrete material legacy of apartheid that continues to influence interactions in contemporary South African society.

Having briefly examined South Africa’s history of apartheid and the residual influences of this past on contemporary social and political realities, it is possible now to analyze the intended and unintended effects of private walls around homes in South Africa within this context.

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<sup>30</sup> Brown, *Walled States*, 21

## **5. PHYSICAL AND VISUAL SEPARATION**

Evidence for the most basic effect of walls around private homes—their physical and visual separation—can be found walking down a typical middle to upper class street in one of a number of cities in South Africa. In the example of Cape Town, communities are largely arranged by income levels, wherein the wealthiest neighborhoods are those closest to the CBD—central business district—with working class neighborhoods fanned out around these, and the poorest townships spread out far from the city center. The effect of this is that day laborers who travel from the poor outskirts of the city pass through middle class and eventually wealthy neighborhoods to arrive at the homes where many work as gardeners, maids, or as other hired help. On this commute many of them walk down streets lined with tall security fences and walls that succeed in physically separating them from the wealthier inhabitants of these homes. In most cases it is difficult if not impossible to even see through these walls, leading to the complete physical and visual separation of poorer Capetonians from wealthier Capetonians. This separation is broken only if the person inside the wall lets the person on the outside in, or if the person outside breaks in.

### **5a. Effects of Visual Separation on Passersby**

What are the direct effects of the visual separation of passersby from residents by walls between residences and streets? What does it mean to be unable to see into yards and houses from the sidewalk? To understand these practical effects, it will help to compare the experience of walking down a sidewalk in a neighborhood without walled homes to the experience of walking down a sidewalk in a neighborhood where the majority of homes are walled off from the **street**. Imagine it is a temperate weekend day and you are taking a leisurely stroll down a

suburban sidewalk. On your right are lawns leading directly to porches and front doors; on your left lies a similar scene. As you walk down this street, you take note of the number of interactions you have with others. At one house you pass by young children playing in their front yard, a few houses farther along you smile at a teen mowing his parents' lawn, and down the street a bit you stop to discuss the pleasant weather with a couple sitting on their porch. Or perhaps you nod to someone washing a car, painting a house, repairing a leaky gutter, or watering plants. Through an open curtain you might even glimpse inside a home to see someone eating a meal, watching television, or reading a book.

The opportunities for random human contact on this street seem endless: a nod here, a wave there, a brief conversation that contains nothing more than small talk. With each of these small interactions, a connection is made between you and these other individuals, even if they are strangers. If nothing else, you leave this walk with the awareness that the inhabitants of these homes play outdoors, mow their lawns, sit on their porches, wash their cars, paint their houses, repair their gutters, or water their plants. As long as you keep your eyes open on this walk, you gather some amount of information about the lives of the individuals living in this neighborhood. For an observant person to leave this walk entirely ignorant of these individuals is all but impossible. While this is clearly an idealized scene that relies to a certain degree on factors such as a sense of security that makes parents feel safe allowing children outdoors and a baseline of social interaction outside the household, it is not difficult to imagine this series of interactions taking place in some form on a typical suburban street without walled homes.

Now imagine you find yourself on a temperate weekend day walking down a street where walls taller than you separate each house from the sidewalk. On both sides of the street you observe a nearly unbroken line of walls that extends in either direction. Some of these walls are

made of concrete, some of brick, and many are topped with broken glass or rows—sometimes dozens high—of electric wire. If you can see through these walls at all it is only through breaks for locked metal pedestrian gates or where automated car gates slide open to allow cars into driveways and then slide shut again. Except for these breaks and the few houses with low walls or fences that allow you to see in, the walls along this street block your view of anything that lies beyond them.

As you walk down the sidewalk, you first take note of the number of people you see, or rather that you do not see. Unless you intentionally make the effort to peer through metal gates—and potentially receive suspicious looks for doing so—it is unlikely you will see children playing in yards, teens mowing lawns, or couples sitting on porches. If possible at all on this street, seeing others and observing their daily activities requires you to take a deliberate action to do so. This is significantly different than the character of the former walk, where you merely had to keep your eyes open to see others going about their business. In the first walk the default condition was to see others and passively gather information about their activities; in this second walk the default condition is to not see others, except those who like yourself are walking along the sidewalk.

As a result of the lower number of sightings of, and interactions with, others on this walk due to the visual obstruction of walls, the atmosphere of this street and thus the experience of walking down it are much different than the walk down the first street. As compared to the active sense of community you felt during that first walk, where you saw residents out engaging with one another around their homes, this second walk lacks this feeling of vibrancy. Between sightings of other passersby and the occasional resident entering or leaving through a gate in a wall, this street feels empty, even desolate, akin to the feeling of walking through a ghost town.

You become aware that if you were to suddenly need directions or other assistance, the barriers to contact with the individuals living in these homes would significantly increase the time required to come face to face with a resident of this neighborhood. Had you urgently needed to speak with someone on your previous walk, you could have walked directly across an open yard, onto a porch, and arrived at a front door where a resident could see you through a peep hole or a window before answering your knock. On this street, however, you would first need to knock or press a buzzer at a gate, wait for admittance into the yard of a home—assuming the resident inside his or her home felt comfortable letting you inside this outer perimeter—then cross this yard to come to a front door before potentially gaining access to a resident. Should you or another passerby need help from residents, the existence of these separating walls—designed to increase the security of residents’ homes—would increase your vulnerability as a passerby. Comparing the process of coming face to face with a resident on this walled street versus the first street throws into high relief a fact that can be overlooked in areas where walled homes are the norm: by visually separating individuals, walls increase the difficulty of coming into contact with residents.

Though residents may be engaged in the same types of activities you witnessed on the first street, due to the success with which their walls visually separate these individuals from you, you are unaware of their presence on this second walk. Even when you become aware of others through sounds of conversation, laughter, or shouts that emanate from behind the walls, these sounds are disembodied, holding no visual focal point where you can direct your attention to potentially interact with these voices. In a sense, then, any sounds that do carry over the walls only make you more aware of your inability to engage with these strangers, intensifying your feeling of visual isolation from the residents of this neighborhood.



It is not just the conspicuous absence of seeing other people that is visually different about this walk; neither do you see lawns, porches, front doors, or the first stories of houses on this street. These are all blocked by the visual imposition of walls on either side of the street. In place of the sight of individuals in yards and on porches, you see to your left and right on this walk blocks-long concrete, brick, and metal obstructions, predominantly white to brown in color. In fact the amount of visual variety you encounter on this walk is greatly decreased. Comparing the view available to you at any given point along this walk and the first walk makes this clear: in the first walk you might see a lawn, driveway, front porch, and the full front view of the house before you, but in the second walk you see only a small patch of grass, the full width and height of the wall, and depending on your height and the height of the house, the upper stories of the house.

Next you note the number of interactions you have on this second walk. With the limitations placed on your ability to see others along your walk, your interactions are also severely limited by the existence of visual barriers between you and the residents of this street. This observation illustrates a key point in understanding the effects of walls on visual separation, interactions between strangers, and, as will be extrapolated in chapter six, on the formation of relationships between strangers. Sight, interactions, and relationships appear in light of this exploration to be linked in the following way, which may seem painstakingly simple but which deserves explicit mention: the formation of relationships between strangers is based on interactions—usually multiple interactions—that tend to incorporate some level of face-to-face communication. Stating this in the negative, if you are unable to see strangers, it is unlikely that you will speak with them or otherwise interact in a way that could lead to the formation of relationships with them.

In view of this generalized understanding of the connection between sight, interaction, and relationship formation, it becomes clear that the more visually separated you are from strangers, the less likely you are to interact—especially on multiple occasions—and thus the less likely you are to ultimately form relationships with them. On streets with walled homes, then, these walls, by imposing visual separation between passersby and residents, limit the potential for random interactions between strangers and thus, to some degree, preclude the formation of relationships between these strangers. After all, what are the chances you will strike up a conversation with strangers sitting on their porch if your only glimpse of them is through an automated security gate between concrete walls topped with electric wire? And how likely is it that you will have a meaningful interaction with neighborhood residents if you are unable to see them over the walls surrounding their homes? With your view of strangers going about their daily activities outside their homes limited by the visual obstruction that their walls impose, your potential for random interaction with strangers, and through these interactions the potential for the formation of relationships, is drastically limited by the existence of walls around homes on this street.

It is also worth noting that those individuals you *do* see on your walk and with whom you are thus able to interact—namely, others who are also walking along the street—occupy a state of non-permanence because of their status as passersby. These individuals, as passersby, are not tied to a fixed location along your walk the way someone sitting on the porch of their permanent residence would be. As such, the chance of “bumping into” a passerby repeatedly over the course of multiple walks is much lower than the chance of “bumping into” someone sitting on his or her porch. And since, as has been shown, walls preclude interactions between passersby and residents, the chance of “bumping into” individuals sitting on their porches is also low. Thus,

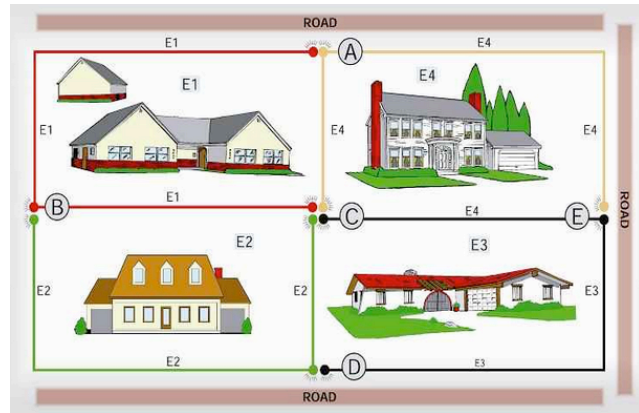
because walls decrease the chances of repeated interactions between passersby and residents and because remaining interactions—between passersby—are less likely to be repeated by chance given the lower likelihood of two passersby randomly meeting each other on their walks on multiple occasions, walls reduce the likelihood that *any* strangers, whether residents or passersby, will interact with each other.

This reflection on the experience of walking along two different streets, one with no walls around homes and one along which most homes are walled off, highlights many of the concrete effects of the visual separation imposed by walls around homes, including limited interactions with strangers, a sense of emptiness compared to streets without walls, and a general decrease in the diversity of sights.

### **5b. Effects of Visual Separation on Residents**

Thus far the focus of analysis has been on the practical effects of visual separation as experienced by individuals walking down streets with walled homes. Now the effects of visual separation by walls will be analyzed from the point of view of residents living in these homes. What does it mean to be visually separated, to a significant degree, from the street on which you live? Several of the effects of this separation are similar to those felt by passersby, though to a somewhat lesser degree. As in the case of passersby's interactions with strangers on walled streets, the chances of residents engaging in random interactions with strangers are also decreased by the existence of walls, since interaction is inhibited when residents cannot see passersby on their streets.

In addition to this decrease in chance contact with strangers, residents in walled homes are also visually separated from their own neighbors. Due to the existence of visually obstructing walls *between* homes, it is as unlikely that residents of walled homes will see their neighbors' children playing or spot their neighbors sitting on their porches as it is that passersby will see these activities taking place. Given the observed connection between sight, interaction, and relationship



*This diagram of an electric fence perimeter between houses indicates the level to which residents are separated by walls from their own neighbors as well as from the street.*

Source:

<http://www.jvasecurity.co.za/?mid=70&mid2=310>, page 14

formation, the limitation on interactions caused by walls is likely to hinder the formation of relationships between neighbors. If not overcome, this hindrance could further negatively impact the formation of a sense of community in neighborhoods where residents are separated from each other by walls between homes. While the force of previously existing relationships with neighbors could help mitigate the effects of visual separation on their chance interactions, due to the existence of visually separating walls these effects exist where they would not otherwise and must first be overcome before visual interaction can take place.

Unlike passersby, residents hold the power to break the visual separation of their walls by unlocking their gates and stepping into their streets should they so desire. Yet it cannot be overlooked that if the default condition of a gate is to be closed, then it will act as a barrier to interaction more often than it will not. Just as the default condition of a walk down a walled street is visual ignorance of the activities taking place behind the walls, the default condition of living in a walled house is greater visual ignorance of what takes place on the street than if the

wall did not exist. If a wall obstructs a resident's view of the street even once, whether from the yard or the lower stories of the house, then this wall has visually separated this resident from the street in a way that would not have been possible if this wall had not been in place. Thus, though it may appear in differing degrees depending on the frequency with which residents attempt to view their streets from their yards or lower stories and cannot, these walls give rise to a default condition of greater visual ignorance by residents of their streets than in neighborhoods without walls.

The link between visual ignorance and mental ignorance of activities beyond the boundaries of the walled home is an important one, and thus the power walls give residents to consider life outside their walls "out of sight, out of mind" has profound consequences. In a society as unequal as South Africa, where short distances separate the very rich and the very poor, these walls can take on a significant insulating role. Phumla Matjila describes the close proximity of the rich and poor in South Africa poignantly when she writes that

The divide between those who have the money to lead a comfortable life and those who do not is miniscule. In some areas, it is a road that divides the two groups of people, in others it is a 3m wall and electric fence.<sup>31</sup>

As Matjila notes, walls between houses and streets can be all that physically separate the rich from the poor in South Africa. Due to this insulation and separation, walls can allow the privileged to ignore the realities of the impoverished in a way that might not be possible without walls blocking from the sight of the wealthy the day-to-day activities of individuals living in shacks without reliable electricity, running water, or private toilets. Derek Hook and Michele Vrdoljak, writing of gated communities in Johannesburg, describe a similar ability of these communities to create for their residents "virtual theme parks, ever more detached from the

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<sup>31</sup> Phumla Matjila, "Let Them Eat Cake," *Times Live*, October 4, 2011.

reality of the asymmetrical socio-economic conditions lying beyond their confines.”<sup>32</sup> By blocking from view the daily activities of others, walls allow residents to mentally separate from themselves those different than themselves. At best, the effects of this visual ignorance of others are mitigated when residents become aware of the visual separation imposed by their walls and actively seek to overcome this separation to view and interact with the world of activities taking place in their streets. At worst, walls between homes and streets allow residents to remain ignorant of the conditions existing beyond their homes’ walls.

Furthermore, because the walls themselves cannot be lowered and raised at the discretion of residents, residents can only avoid the effect of visual separation if they step beyond their walls into streets to meet strangers. Yet once they leave their homes to do so, residents become passersby themselves and experience the effects of visual separation by *others’* walls from the outside. This is one of the most interesting effects of the visual separation—not to mention the physical and mental separation—caused by walls around private homes: with the existence of walls, the only way those on the outside can overcome their effects of separation from those on the inside is to step inside and thus separate themselves from others on the outside; conversely, the only way those on the inside can overcome this separation is to step outside their boundaries, and thus separate themselves from others who remain on the inside of them. Put another way, if every individual in a neighborhood remains inside the wall of his or her house, then every individual is visually separated from every other individual not inside the same wall. If half these individuals step outside their walls, this half is no longer separated from each other, but they are still separated from the remaining half, which is likewise separated from this first half and from each other. Even if all but one individual steps outside his or her wall, this group is still separated

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<sup>32</sup> Derek Hook and Michele Vrdoljak, "Gated communities, heterotopia and a “rights” of privilege: a ‘heterotopology’ of the South African security-park," *Geoforum* 33, no. 2 (2002): 202.

from that remaining individual, and he or she from them. Only if every individual steps outside his or her wall is no individual visually separated from another.

This chapter has analyzed private walls around homes as visual obstructions and has explored the various practical effects of visual separation on residents in walled homes as well as on individuals walking through their streets. Through this exploration it has become clear that the visual separation imposed by walls can lead to limited interactions between strangers and between neighbors, increased perceptions of neighborhoods' emptiness by passersby due to limited sightings of residents, and decreased awareness by passersby and residents of what takes place on either side of the walls.

## 6. RELATIONSHIPS: WALLS, INTERACTION, AND POWER

*Space affects how individuals and groups  
perceive their place in the order of things.  
Spatial configurations naturalize social relations  
by transforming contingent forms into a permanent landscape  
that appears as immutable rather than open to contestation.*<sup>33</sup>

-Margaret Kohn, *Radical Space: Building the House of the People*

The physical and visual separation imposed by walls around private homes explored in the previous section has profound impacts on the formation of relationships around these barriers. Walls impact the formation of relationships in two significant ways: firstly, their presence can preclude the formation of positive relationships between strangers, and secondly they can catalyze the formation of negative relationships between those on either side. The first of these effects—the preclusion of positive relationship formation between strangers—was observed when comparing a walk down a walled street to one down a street without walls. This effect follows directly from walls’ quality of physical and visual separation: if individuals are unable to see each other due to walls, they are unlikely to interact and thus unlikely to form mutually positive relationships with each other. Walls’ second major effect on relationships in their presence—catalyzing the formation of negative relationships—follows from their influence on the balance of power within relationships between those on the inside of these walls and those on the outside.

### 6a. Enforcement of Exclusion from the Walled Yard

Because of their nature as barriers, walls can lead to the creation of unequal power relationships between individuals within their boundaries and those outside these boundaries. At

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<sup>33</sup> Margaret Kohn, *Radical Space: Building the House of the People* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 3.



the most basic level, the existence of a wall around a private home grants a resident increased power to restrict access to the space of his or her yard, while simultaneously taking away the power of access from every individual who does not have the ability to unlock the gate to this wall. It could be argued that, by virtue of private property claims inherent to the system of property ownership existent in South Africa and other nations, the yard represents a private space that is off limits to all others regardless of the existence or absence of a wall. John Locke, arguing that property “is for the benefit and sole advantage of the proprietor,” makes this type of argument about the inherent privacy of property.<sup>34</sup> While this argument may hold in theory, its application to practical situations raises important questions of excludability and enforceability in situations where walls surrounding yards are present and where they are not.

Consider the practicality of this argument in the case of a non-walled yard: if a non-resident, seeking a shortcut between rows of houses, crosses a section of a yard adjacent to a resident’s home to access another public space, under this argument this action constitutes an implicit challenge to the claim of the private nature of this space. If the resident’s claim to the privacy of his or her yard is thus challenged, what recourse is available to the resident? Supposing the resident wishes to enforce his or her right to the privacy of the yard and demand the removal of the individual crossing it, the resident may confront the non-resident and cite the privacy rights granted by the holding of a title deed, thus demanding the individual remove himself or herself from the yard. Should the individual comply, the resident will have successfully enforced the private nature of his or her yard, through deliberate action and confrontation with the non-resident. However, should the non-resident refuse to leave this property, the resident will be left with the options of physically removing the non-resident

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<sup>34</sup> John Locke, *The Two Treatises of Civil Government* (London: R. Butler et al., 1821), 105.

through confrontation or of requesting that local police or private security step in to physically enforce the private nature of his or her yard. All of these options of recourse require deliberate action by the resident to enforce the private nature of the yard, due to the non-excludable nature of a non-walled yard.

Now consider this previous scenario if it should take place in the presence of homes with nine-foot tall concrete walls surrounding the yards, each topped with a dozen rows of electric wire designed to deliver the maximum legal shock upon contact: 9,900 volts of electricity.<sup>35</sup> In this scenario, an individual seeking a shortcut between streets of back-to-back houses must climb a nine-foot tall wall, deal with a dozen rows of electric wire either by clipping them—thus setting off built-in burglar alarms—or by sustaining 9,900 volts of electric current, cross a section of yard, climb a second wall between yards and contend with electric wire, cross a second yard, and contend with a third wall and set of electric wire to reach the adjacent street. Given this lengthy process, by which an individual could sustain three doses of 9,900-volt shocks or set off alarms linked to two different homes, it seems clear that this path no longer represents a shortcut. Thus, the walls around these homes have effectively enforced the exclusion of non-residents from residents' yards, without any action taken by the residents beyond the initial building of walls around their homes.

Comparing these two scenarios sheds light on the exact effects of walls on relationships of power between residents and non-residents. Consider the ability of residents in each of these two scenarios, the first in the absence of walls around homes and the second in the presence of such walls, to enforce their claims to private property within their yards by excluding non-residents. In the former, a resident must take deliberate action to enforce the exclusion of others

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<sup>35</sup> Gido Electric Fencing, "General FAQ's," [http://www.gido.co.za/pages/el\\_FAQs\\_general.htm](http://www.gido.co.za/pages/el_FAQs_general.htm).

from his or her un-walled yard through confrontation or by calling in police or private security forces. In the latter, the physical separation and threat of harm imposed by a wall excludes non-residents from accessing the private property of the yard.<sup>36</sup> Thus, it seems clear that walls around homes provide to residents a power to enforce the exclusion of others from their properties that does not exist in the absence of these walls. In so doing, these walls increase the power with which residents can enforce claims to the private nature of their property against the larger public, while simultaneously decreasing the ability of non-residents to access this property.

### **6b. The Unequal Distribution of Power in the Presence of Walls**

The previous example helps illustrate the ways walls around private homes affect the balance of power between residents and non-residents with regard to the ability to restrict access to property. Taking into account walls' quality of visual separation as well as the ability of residents to open their gates or otherwise overcome this separation highlights a second way in which walls influence relationships of power between those on the inside and those on the outside. The relationship created by the existence of a wall is one in which the person inside the wall must *allow* access to the person outside the wall before any direct interaction can take place between the two. Put simply, the wall forces the person on the street to ask permission to even see the face of the person within the wall.

This distribution of power in the presence of walls is reminiscent of social interactions in other spheres of South African society, as well, where these physical walls are not present. One such example is that of the individual who knocks on car windows at traffic lights to ask to clean drivers' windows for a small fee. Without permission from the driver, signaled by rolling down

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<sup>36</sup> Electric fence advertisements emphasize such deterrence through threat of physical pain as one of the main benefits of installing electric fencing to keep out would-be criminals. See Gido Electric Fencing, "The Advantages of an Electric Fence as a Deterrent," Gido Electric Fencing, [http://www.gido.co.za/pages/el\\_advantages.htm](http://www.gido.co.za/pages/el_advantages.htm).

the window to speak, the window washer is not allowed any chance to interact with the person inside the car. Beggars hint at a similar relationship by which someone from a lower economic class must be granted audience with someone from a higher class for an interaction to take place, lest the wealthier individual walks by without stopping to acknowledge the presence of the poorer.

Even in these situations, however, the window washer and beggar are able to *see* the person from whom they are requesting acknowledgment and money without asking permission; however, in the case of the passerby and the resident, the passersby must first ask permission to see the resident. This relationship is inherently unequal, conferring power to certain individuals based on their location behind the walls. The inequality of this relationship is further intensified if those on the street, outside the walls, do not have walls of their own from which to gain the power of granting or denying permission and access to others.

This inequality of power within relationships created around walls is especially significant given the sociopolitical history of South Africa and the current economic and social inequality facing the country. South Africa is one of the most economically unequal countries in the world, with the second worst score on the Gini Index of economic inequality<sup>37</sup> and with the wealthiest ten percent of households holding more than 50% of the nation's wealth while the lowest ten percent hold barely 1% of the wealth.<sup>38</sup> Economic inequality and resulting unequal

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<sup>37</sup> This Gini Index score is based on the most recent data from South Africa, submitted in 2005. Central Intelligence Agency, "Country Comparison: Distribution of Family Income – Gini Index," *The World Factbook*, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/rankorder/2172rank.html?countryName=South%20Africa&countryCode=sf&regionCode=afr&rank=2#sf>.

<sup>38</sup> These figures represent the most recent data from the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, from 2009, which lists the top 10% of households holding 51.7% of wealth while the lowest 10% hold 1.2%. Central Intelligence Agency, "South Africa," *The World Factbook*, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/sf.html>.

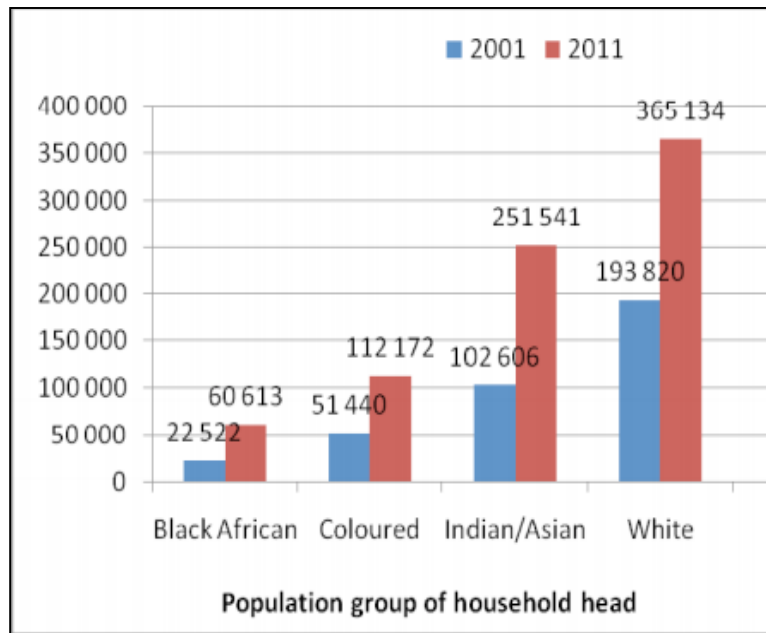
access to resources are crippling problems for millions of South Africans, as some 50% of the nation's 48 million citizens live below the poverty line.<sup>39</sup>

It is impossible to separate this economic inequality from South Africa's apartheid past. As a lingering result of apartheid policies, which featured the

forced removal of thousands of persons of color from their homes in desirable city centers to the undesirable outskirts of cities and

rural areas, contemporary South African cities remain geographically divided along lines of socioeconomic status and race. Though some diversification of neighborhoods has occurred, cities are still largely arranged in patterns of class and race deliberately stamped onto the geography by the apartheid government. This geographic reality is one in which populations are largely arranged such that the most affluent individuals are those closest to the city center, with lower socioeconomic classes on the peripheries. The poorest urban populations live in townships—shantytowns of makeshift homes in the least desirable physical locations—designed during the days of apartheid. Many homes in these communities are built of scrap wood and

**South African Average Annual Household Income by Population Group of Household Head**



*This graph, displaying data from the 2011 national census, highlights the prevalence of economic inequality by race. Income is here measured in South African rand (\$1 = average 7.562 rand in 2011). Source: graph from <http://www.statssa.gov.za/Publications/P03014/P030142011.pdf>, exchange rate from U.S. IRS 2011 Yearly Average Exchange Rates. <http://www.irs.gov/Individuals/International-Taxpayers/Yearly-Average-Currency-Exchange-Rates>*

<sup>39</sup> This is a 2000 estimate finding 50% of the population below the poverty line. Ibid.

corrugated metal, where dozens of individuals share water sources and toilets and have little to no reliable electricity.

Due to this geographic arrangement of populations, random interactions between individuals of different socioeconomic status and race within the same neighborhood are



*This township outside Johannesburg, a designated area for black South Africans during apartheid, lacks reliable access to running water, toilets, and electricity. Photograph by author.*

unlikely. Furthermore, given the distance between townships and centers of industry and commerce and the lack of jobs in these poorer outskirts, individuals from these areas must travel daily into more affluent areas to work as hired help. Given their lower socioeconomic status, the vast majority of these individuals, almost exclusively persons of color, do not own cars. Transportation options available to these individuals, then, are limited to public transportation or walking. Public transportation options in Cape Town consist of the MetroRail commuter train, public buses, taxi cabs, and privately owned *mini bus taxis* that charge low fares and pick up customers along common routes, packing many passengers into a single vehicle. For economic reasons, the most popular modes of transportation for workers who travel daily from the outskirts of cities to city centers are mini bus taxis, other forms of carpooling, and walking.

Whatever form of transportation they choose, individuals traveling from the poor outskirts of cities into the richer city centers pass through neighborhoods of increasing affluence as they make their way daily to their places of work. As they travel to work, these individuals

pass through street after street of wall-surrounded homes. On these trips, whether by mini bus or by foot, these travelers act as passersby to the residents of these homes. As previously observed, because walls around homes visually and physically separate these passersby from the more affluent residents, chance interactions between the two groups are unlikely. As a result, the random formation of positive relationships between these groups is even less likely.

Precluded from interactions across race and class that would make positive relationships between strangers feasible, poorer individuals are instead met with an unwelcoming sight on their daily commutes. Impenetrable barriers designed to keep out criminals—“visible sign[s] of exclusion,” as Blakely and Snyder call them—rise on either side of the streets down which poorer workers commute.<sup>40</sup> Absent the potential for chance interactions between poorer passersby and wealthier residents—due to the existence of walls—prevailing stereotypes become increasingly prominent in these group’s perceptions of each other. Blakely and Snyder, in describing gated communities, argue that the absence of interaction between individuals due to physical and visual separation can produce a variety of misconceptions and ill-feelings between them: “In socially isolated environments, social distance leads to stereotyping and misunderstanding, which in turn leads to fear.”<sup>41</sup> In South Africa, such misunderstandings manifest themselves in stereotypes that connect race, socioeconomic status, and criminal character, such that poor persons of color are often viewed as would-be criminals to be feared. Since the majority of those traveling daily as passersby down walled streets from their homes to their jobs are poorer persons of color, it is not hard to imagine that these workers could begin to feel that the walls exist to keep out individuals like themselves. Such a realization, whether justified or not, can lead to feeling unwanted, resented, and even criminal. Added to these

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<sup>40</sup> Blakely and Snyder, *Fortress*, 153.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 138.

feelings is a stark awareness that, given the economic inequality between themselves and residents of these homes, poorer individuals passing these walls are unable to afford walls for themselves.

This chapter has argued that walls that separate more affluent individuals from those who pass by on their daily commutes from poor communities to cities for work have various impacts on the formation of relationships between different classes and races. Firstly, they preclude the formation of positive relationships between strangers on either side. In place of these positive relationships, their very existence creates unequal relationships of power, whereby one group of individuals must ask permission to see the faces of the other. The unequal nature of this power relationship is further intensified by the economic inequality between poorer individuals who walk past walls and the more affluent residents behind them. Due to stereotypes and perceptions of crime, walls can take on an accusatory presence, fostering resentment from passersby of suspicion by affluent residents, whether imagined or real. Given these effects and the context of South Africa's apartheid past, walls appear in this landscape as a symbol of the ability to afford protection against others as well as an embodiment of the fear of crime by those different than oneself. As such they represent a contemporary outlet for the exclusion, isolation, and separation of poorer persons of color.



## 7. IDENTITIES: “INSIDE” V. “OUTSIDE,” “US” V. “THEM”

*Before I built a wall I'd ask to know  
What I was walling in or walling out,  
And to whom I was like to give offence.  
Something there is that doesn't love a wall,  
That wants it down...<sup>42</sup>*

-Robert Frost, “Mending Wall”

As has been seen, walls separate individuals, limit interactions, and direct the nature of the relationships created in their presence. As each of these already observed effects is built on the effects analyzed before it, so too is the third major effect of walls in South African society an extension of the previous effects. This third effect, arising as a consequence of walls’ influences on separation, limited interaction, and the nature of relationships around them, is the interpellation of a set of identities based on individuals’ locations relative to the walls.

### 7a. National Border Literature and Perceptions of the Self and the Other

The studies of walls and their effects at the national level, through the literature on borders and border identities, as well as at the community level, through gated community literature, are concerned to a great degree with the formation and adoption of identities on either side of these boundaries. Generally, thorough analyses of physical boundaries at the national and community levels find that as a result of physical/visual separation and social isolation caused by these boundaries, nations and communities, implicitly or explicitly, emphasize perceived differences between themselves and those on the outside of these boundaries, identifying a definitive “Us” inside at odds with the “Them” outside. To these identities are often ascribed characteristic qualities and values that are viewed in contrast to each other. The barriers between

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<sup>42</sup> Robert Frost, “Mending Wall,” in *The Poetry of Robert Frost* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1969), 33.

the “Us” inside and the “Them” outside, then, become both a mechanism for protecting against influence by the “other” as well as the symbolic line in the sand that defines “inside” from “outside.”

John Allen, writing of gated communities and other communal forms of walling off, argues that identities drawn by walls are connected to each other, in a negative way, by virtue of the perceived differences of those on the outside from those on the inside. For Allen, walling off represents a project of excluding those who are perceived as different from oneself. This project requires first that these groupings be definitively established, which can be simultaneously accomplished by the construction of walls to divide individuals and communities. Allen argues that identities on either side of the wall are dependent on one another for their definition: the existence of a defined “Us” inside the wall and all the assigned characteristics and values that accompany this identity cannot exist without a defined “Them” (even if defined only through the sense that “Them” incorporates everything that is not “Us”) on the outside of the wall. He elaborates this dependency of identification in the following passage:

When people draw ‘walls’ around themselves in this way, their sense of who they are is not established in a vacuum. It is established *in relation* to how they think others live and behave...If the enclosed community imagines itself to be respectable, civilized, law-abiding, middle-class, and the like, then this is precisely because it imagines that many of those on the outside are *not* these things. In this way, the insulated community establishes a sense of itself from that which it is not.<sup>43</sup>

Allen’s characterization of the process of walling off highlights the negatively dependent way in which identities are often created in relation to walls: these identities depend on conceptualizations of the “other” for their definition as the opposite of these qualities.

Wendy Brown likewise observes the connection between the mutually exclusive yet interconnected nature of identities defined against one another in her analysis of walls at the

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<sup>43</sup> John Allen, “Worlds Within Cities,” in *City Worlds*, ed. Doreen Massey, John Allen, and Steve Pile (London: Routledge in association with the Open University Press, 1999), 85.

national level. Writing of the Israeli wall built to separate itself from Palestine, Brown argues that this physical barrier is portrayed by the Israeli government as a line in the sand between the imagined characteristics and values associated with the identities of those on the inside and those on the outside. She argues that these identities are imagined and portrayed as oppositional and mutually exclusive: “The [Israeli] wall, in short, is depicted as preserving innocence and civilization against its opposite and as standing in every way for humane and life-preserving values against barbaric and murderous ones.”<sup>44</sup> Here the values assigned to one side are set in direct contrast to those on the other side; indeed, these values are set up as incompatible with each other. Because these opposite values—barbarism and civilization, innocence and murder—cannot be reconciled with each other, such depictions of the wall and the identities of those on either side send an implicit message that these groups of people cannot coexist.

The conclusion of the impossibility of coexistence—whether drawn implicitly or explicitly—can act as a justification for separation by physical boundaries. This conclusion and justification can create a feedback loop for those who follow this circular logic: *The wall defines who is inside and who is outside. We are a group of individuals inside the wall who have certain qualities and values, and they are a group of individuals outside the wall, who have different qualities and values. In fact, their qualities and values are the opposite of our qualities and values, and thus are incompatible. Because these qualities and values are incompatible, we cannot coexist with them. Because we cannot coexist with them, this wall is necessary to separate and protect us from them. And because the wall exists, we know who is on the inside and who is on the outside...* Following this logic, which revolves around the existence of a wall as a physical manifestation of boundaries, perceptions of differences between those on either side

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<sup>44</sup> Brown, *Walled States*, 121-22.

are seen as justification for isolation by walls. This isolation in turn reinforces perceptions of difference, which in turn justify further isolation, continually intensifying perceptions of difference and the desire for walls.

### **7b. Mutually Exclusive Identities in the Context of the Apartheid Past**

Insights from these literatures concerning the process of identity creation as well as the nature of these identities are invaluable to understanding similar effects of private walls in South Africa. That walls can facilitate the creation of identities in those on either side and the ascription to these identities of diametrically opposed qualities and values is all the more significant to South Africa because of its apartheid past and that past's ongoing influence in contemporary society. This past featured the creation of identities based on government-sanctioned racial groupings defined as oppositional to one another and incapable of coexisting. Though no longer government sanctioned, perceptions of identities confrontational to one another are still very present in South African society. As Hook and Vrdoljak note, divisions along lines of socioeconomic status and class have replaced government sanctioned racial segregation.<sup>45</sup> In the geography of contemporary urban South Africa, in which the artificial enforcement of racial and socioeconomic segregation under apartheid's forced removals continues to influence the arrangements of individuals of different classes within the urban landscape, identities increasingly center on socioeconomic class and status.

Walls within this sociopolitical context become a symbol of economic status and the ability to secure one's home from outside threats. Hook and Vrdoljak, describing security-obsessed gated communities in South Africa, note that the existence of security measures such as

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<sup>45</sup> Hook and Vrdoljak, "Gated Communities," 204-5. However, while no longer government mandated, the reality of economic divisions in South Africa today are still firmly rooted in race, as persons of color removed from their homes and jobs under apartheid were unable to provide for their children opportunities to advance beyond present conditions of poverty, thus perpetuating discrimination of economic and social privilege into future generations.

walls, electrified fences, and burglar systems can be viewed as a “powerful economic indicator of affluence.”<sup>46</sup> Walls in these instances, then, become more than measures of security: they begin to exist as symbols of economic status and of the ability to protect oneself from the public with elaborate, expensive, and highly visible constructions. These walls allow residents behind them to identify with a class of individuals who are able to protect themselves from others—an identity that incorporates both the previously noted power of exclusion as well as their higher socioeconomic status. Thus, identities around these walls emerge around a dichotomy of those who seek walls’ protection *from* others and those whom others seek protection *against* through the construction of walls. This conception of an “Us” protected by walls against a “Them” renews the divisiveness of identities created under apartheid racial classifications.

If this is the nature of the “Us” behind South African walls, what is the nature of the “Them” on the street? The identity imposed by walls on those outside their boundaries is one of disempowerment and exclusion. Those outside are also made painfully aware that walls represent the desire of residents to protect homes and families from crime and others on the street. Given the lingering racial segregation of neighborhoods, persons of color walking through streets of predominantly white residents can feel quickly targeted as threats, a targeting that can leave those outside the walls feeling criminalized and unwelcome. Lindsay Bremner importantly notes how closely race is intertwined with socioeconomic status in contemporary South Africa in ways that create a reality of racial tensions and socioeconomic inequality in which “the black poor are automatically identified as the perpetrators.”<sup>47</sup> Thus, the identity reinforced by the existence of walls in upper and middle-income neighborhoods is one formerly imposed by racial segregation

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<sup>46</sup> Hook and Vrdoljak, “Gated Communities,” 199.

<sup>47</sup> Lindsay Bremner, “Crime and the Emerging Landscape of Post-apartheid Johannesburg,” in *Blanc\_: Architecture, Apartheid and After*, ed. Hilton Judin and Ivan Vladislavic (Rotterdam: Nai Publishers, 2000), 56.

under apartheid: that of the poor, black criminal excluded from security and privilege by virtue of status and race.

This chapter has argued that the contexts of South Africa's apartheid past, its current socioeconomic and racial inequality, and its culture of fear and security reinforce the identities imposed by walls on those inside and those outside. Specifically, these walls interpellate those on the inside as members of a privileged class of higher status, income, and security and those on the outside as poor criminals to be feared and excluded, unwelcome by virtue of an otherness derived from race and status. These identities rely on each other for their existence, but not in any positive way: walls become meaningless unless there is someone to keep out, and the terms "inside" and "outside" rely on each other for definition. Through the creation of these mutually exclusive, oppositional identities, walls bring about a consciousness in those on either side. In this way these walls enable an "other"-ing of those on the outside that reinforces perceptions of "Us"/"Them" dichotomies in South African society.

## 8. CONCLUSIONS

### 8a. Three Effects Revisited

This paper has sought to understand the intended and unintended effects of private walls around homes in South Africa, specifically regarding the separation of individuals, the formation of relationships across class and race, and the identification of those on the inside and those on the outside. Through observation, thought experiments, and close readings of related literatures, it has been shown that walls around private homes produce a variety of effects. Firstly, they visually and physically separate individuals, resulting in decreased interactions between residents and passersby as well as between neighbors and decreased awareness among these groups. Due to the socioeconomic arrangement of South African cities, interactions between individuals of different races and socioeconomic classes are especially limited by walls. Secondly, walls preclude the formation of positive relationships between strangers of different classes and races, and they catalyze the formation of unequal relationships of power. This imbalance is compounded by existing economic and social inequality in contemporary South Africa. Thirdly, walls encourage the adoption of inherently oppositional identities based around status and security, which results in the creation of Us/Them divisions between those on the inside and those on the outside.

While these effects can be seen to be direct results of the existence of walls around private homes, the walls themselves must not be fetishized: the power to wall off or remain un-walled lies with every individual. In addition, there are a number of considerations that deserve further attention, such as practical constraints on residents including actual crime rates, homeowners' insurance requirements, and social pressures, as well as thorough examination of the efficacy of walls and other security measures to prevent crime. These considerations all

highlight the need to view walls in South African society as one piece of a larger cultural understanding of crime, fear, and security.

### **8b. Walls And The South African Security Culture**

*Unfortunately with our current crime situation  
the need is for effective security, not just a token fence...  
All energiser outputs are governed by legislation not to exceed 9900 Volts.  
A 9900 Volt shock is nasty, very nasty.<sup>48</sup>*

-Gido Electric Fence Company, "Frequently Asked Questions"

*Our housing choices are far more complex than simple economic options.  
They symbolize what we want for our families and communities  
and what we don't want, what we value and what we fear.<sup>49</sup>*

-Edward J. Blakely and Mary Gail Snyder, *Fortress America*

What causes an individual to construct a 10-foot wall around a private home, embed shards of broken glass in it, and top it with multiple strands of constantly ticking electrical wire? Are the pressures to wall off one's home merely practical considerations, or are there underlying ideological motivations as well? Scholars studying gated communities and the security industry, which employs all measures from electric fences to home alarm system response teams armed with automatic rifles, generally attribute the explosion of the security industry to homeowners' concerns of safety from crime and violence, which might seem an obvious connection. However, Hook and Vrdoljak, studying the gated community, or "security-park," of Dainfern near Johannesburg, suggest a key distinction: they argue that the increase in security measures is

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<sup>48</sup> Gido Electric Fencing, "General FAQ's."

<sup>49</sup> Blakely and Snyder, *Fortress America*, 145.



based not on statistics such as crime rates, but rather on individual and societal *perceptions* of crime, which may or may not accurately reflect the relative threat of crime in a given location.<sup>50</sup>

Hook and Vrdoljak's distinction is an important one for several reasons. Firstly, it implies that public perceptions of crime in South Africa surpass actual crime rates, indicating that there exists a driving force, whether social or private, that leads South Africans to fear crime that does not necessarily exist in the ways they believe it does. Secondly, this distinction implies that to some extent the decision to build a wall around one's home or otherwise employ security measures is based on information that is less than complete. Finally, it suggests that a fear of crime, enough to build a wall around one's house, exists to a considerable extent in South African society, indicating that this issue weighs heavily on South Africans.

Broadening our view of walls to include other similar phenomena, private walls around homes must be analyzed as one manifestation of what Lindsay Bremner terms a "culture of security" in post-apartheid South Africa. Today fear of crime is a paramount consideration of middle and upper class South Africa, and in response an obsession with security is present in much of these populations. This obsession has gripped the country to the point that Bremner is able to write that in South Africa, "security has become a way of life."<sup>51</sup> Writing of crime, security, and the impact of gated communities in Johannesburg, Bremner describes a fear of crime that has given rise to a security culture in which those who can in middle and upper class South Africa are building whatever defenses possible against perceived threats:

The middle-class is fortifying itself. People surround their homes and business with walls, razor wire, electrified fencing, security gates, intercoms, cameras and armed human shields to blank out the criminal reality of the public realm...The white suburbs, with their tree-lined streets, grassed verges, snug suburban homes and good neighbourliness are being reconstructed according to the logic of fortification.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Hook and Vrdoljak, "Gated Communities," 197.

<sup>51</sup> Bremner, "Crime," 56.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

Examining advertisements for security walls and electrified fences in South Africa emphasizes the level to which notions of crime, fear, and security have been linked in understandings of contemporary South Africa and the ways that walls and security fences are concrete manifestations of the security culture. In the introduction to its product catalogue, one electric fence company makes a clear connection between the prevalence of security fences within South African society and a belief in the necessity and efficacy of security walls and fences: “The proliferation of non-lethal, monitored, electric security fences in our towns and cities is indicative of the confidence the public has in this form of perimeter security.”<sup>53</sup>

The following advertisements for electric fences and walls highlight fear of crime, the need for protection that makes a statement to would-be criminals, and the security and safety these measures will provide residents. One advertisement describes the six main advantages of using electrified fencing, three of which are “physical and psychological barrier,” “the shock capacity,” and “perimeter protection.” Elaborating on these advantages, the company emphasizes the threat of pain their fences pose to would-be criminals that will deter those on the outside from attempting to break in:

**1. Physical and psychological barrier**

- It is extremely difficult to just climb over an 8 or 10 strand square tubing wall-top electrified fence without touching the wires. The *psychological fact* that you are going to get *severely shocked* in the event that you touch the wires, even accidentally, is enough to deter most criminals from even trying to breach it.

**2. Shock**

- A correctly wired and properly earthed installation has the capacity to *shock any person severely!* Such a shock would deter any normal person from trying to breach the fence.

**3. Perimeter protection**

- Many families are reluctant to use their entertainment areas for *fear of being attacked*. With a quality, effective electric fence you and your

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<sup>53</sup> JVA Electric Fence Systems, “Catalogue: JVA Security Energisers and Accessories,” JVA Electric Fence Systems, <http://www.jvasecurity.co.za/?mid=70&mid2=310>, page 2.

family are now able to *enjoy total freedom on your own property* without having to look over your shoulder.<sup>54</sup> (emphasis mine)

Within this advertisement, fear of violent crime, the need for aggressive security measures, and the protection and sense of freedom these measures promise are all noted. The connection between these concepts is established in these advertisements in the following way: 1) violent crime exists and should thus be feared, 2) electric fences offer an aggressive form of security that physically and psychologically deters criminals from attacking residents, and 3) these forms of security are effective and offer a freedom from fear.

The stated objectives of these electric fences are strikingly similar to those Blakely and Snyder identify in security zone gated communities. In these communities, individuals motivated by fear of crime seek security measures designed to “exclude the places and people they perceive as threats to their safety and quality of life.”<sup>55</sup> In unambiguous language, the above advertisements for electric fences seek the same goal: the aggressive exclusion of those on the outside who might do harm to those on the inside. These advertisements, and to an even greater degree the walls and fences they market, are concrete manifestations of the culture of crime, fear, and security that today exists in South Africa.

### **8c. Walls as Antithetical to the Goals of a New South Africa**

When analyzed in conjunction with the divisive effects of walls on interactions, relationships, and identities, this culture of fear and security appears at odds with the aims of a racially harmonious and equal South Africa. If walls decrease the mingling of peoples of different races and classes, substitute unequal power relationships in place of more positive relationships, and encourage the adoption of oppositional identities, how can the project of racial

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<sup>54</sup> Gido Electric Fencing, “The Advantages of an Electric Fence as a Deterrant”

<sup>55</sup> Blakely and Snyder, *Fortress America*, 45.

harmony and economic equality be realized? It would seem that walls and the larger culture of fear and security inhibit the ability of South Africans to achieve these ideals. Taking this a step further, if these goals of racial harmony and greater equality are truly held by the society at-large, then walls, seen to erode the possibility of achieving these goals, are at odds with the very goals of South African society. Hook and Vrdoljak go so far as to claim that the segregation inherent to the project of walling off undertaken by residents of gated communities represents “a new separatism for South Africa, one in which the prospects of a truly democratic and demographically representative sense of community are dashed.”<sup>56</sup>

Looking back to South Africa’s apartheid past, it seems that walls, in their observed effects of separation, exclusion, and the extension of further privilege to those of higher socioeconomic status, constitute a continuation of the apartheid project of separate development. Though clearly of a different form and magnitude than government-led institutionalized racism, walls enforce similar trends within South African society as those that prevailed under apartheid. By virtue of the existence of walls, segregation of classes and races is strengthened, interaction between diverse populations is limited, and isolation and ignorance become default conditions.

#### **8d. A Future Without Walls?**

I would like to conclude this discussion by looking past the walls. What would happen if walls around homes across South Africa were suddenly, comprehensively, torn down? It is of course difficult to say, but it is likely that the unequal relationships developed in their presence would persist for some time. Crime would likely increase, at least initially, as homes became easier targets to opportunistic criminals. Residents of previously walled homes would likely

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<sup>56</sup> Hook and Vrdoljak, “Gated Communities,” 206.

experience a new sense of vulnerability that is today kept at bay by the comforting presence of barricades of concrete and electricity.

Once the initial effects of crime and heightened vulnerability began to settle, however, I believe a new paradigm would emerge. Faced for the first time in decades with the honest, grim, unequal reality of the state of the Rainbow Nation today, I believe an awakening would occur in formerly walled-off South Africans. As a diverse society learned to constructively deal with itself and confront fear, ignorance, and misplaced hatred, individuals from different races and classes would be given an opportunity to interact in a way that they are currently unable to do so due to separation and isolation imposed by walls that divide rich from poor and black from white and create Us/Them dichotomies around these categories.

Shaking off the fog of an isolated and incomplete dream kept alive for too long by the ignorance of separation, South Africans could step for the first time from their doors and engage with others—different from them in race, class, and opportunity but bound to them by their shared humanity and an earnest desire to at last break the bonds of their mutual oppression and work together to construct a truly *new* South Africa.

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