Security and space: managing the contradictions of access restriction in Johannesburg

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Abstract. Local officials attempt to resolve deep contradictions in most urban settings. The gating of sections of cities provides a notable example, setting fear of crime against rights of movement and access. Johannesburg, South Africa, reveals just such challenges. In this paper the authors review the recent history of policy formulation by city officials on ‘security access restriction’ in Johannesburg. They note the diverse and shifting views and behaviour of various actors and the difficulties faced by policymakers. They highlight how policy has emerged in a profoundly controversial and contested terrain, showing how Johannesburg, at least, has attempted to manage the conflicts. However, the policy environment remains unstable, and existing policy may be only a partial and temporary resolution to a deep contradiction.

Introduction
Managers in urban authorities are as keenly aware as anyone of the difficulties of bridging the contradictions between different priorities. In the quest for ‘better’ urban futures, a sharp-edged example arises in the contest between the desire for those things often defined as ‘urban’—shared public space, for example—and the desire for security in dangerous times. This paper is about the depth of these contradictions and different ways of bridging them—and in that sense it is about something increasingly common in the urban world.

The paper is set in the context of Johannesburg, a city of roughly three million people in a highly urbanised yet rurally linked context. Johannesburg is a ‘globalising city in a poor country’ (Parnell and Crankshaw, 2004). It is a newly democratic city rhetorically dedicated to addressing first and foremost the needs of the poor and the excluded. It is a city that has adopted a concern for economic growth as the main means to addressing its problems. It is a city perceived by residents and visitors alike to have high rates of violence and crime. Within its spaces, common responses include newly developed private spaces that masquerade as public areas (Mabin, 2001) and the entrenchment of private defence against public view and access (Czegledy, 2003). It is also a city that, after a period of public vacillation during which public roads in some 500 neighbourhoods were semiprivately gated or fenced for security reasons, has adopted a policy making all such gating and fencing rather more difficult but not impossible. It is, in other words, a city of paradoxes, not the least of which is expressed in the question of the restriction of access to public areas.

This paper is specifically about conflict over what we call ‘security access restriction’—attempts to limit access to existing ‘open’ neighbourhoods, a process sometimes referred to as ‘retrofitting’. Our objectives are thus to identify the issues, to indicate the impacts of security access restriction on the city, and, on that basis, to offer commentary on the options available to city government to bridge what we refer to as the contradictions of
security and space. The bigger question of managing the contradictions is what we return to at the end of the paper. The major actors in the terrain investigated include the city council—including politicians and officials—residents within sections of the city subject to access restriction, other city residents, including those working within gated areas but residing elsewhere, the police, and private security agencies. Across these groupings interests are clearly diverse but, as the research showed, not always readily predictable.

The research that forms the basis of this paper was performed in 2001 and 2002. An open-ended brief from the City of Johannesburg allowed us and our assistants to investigate the growing phenomenon of road closures intended as security measures in the city. Subsequently, the city authorities revised policy and practice in response to such developments, and we pursued the more academic interest of the difficulties of managing the process, viewed from an external perspective.

The research was based primarily on thirty-four interviews, the respondents being: five residents of a township commuting to work or to seek work in affected areas, two low-wage workers living in affected areas, four members of residents' associations in affected areas, one politician each from the majority and minority sides of the city council, eleven officials of the council and its agencies, one official of a large neighbouring local authority, four police representatives, one official of a private security firm offering services in affected areas, three prominent crime and security researchers, and a lawyer engaged in case work on the subject. We focused mainly on three sections of the city in selecting our informants, representing a range of localities at different distances from the city centre. Interviews were open ended but detailed, in most cases face to face and lasting up to ninety minutes. The research engaged with individuals drawn from each of the major affected constituencies but clearly could not be regarded as comprehensive given the more than 500 sections of the city affected by the phenomenon under investigation and the many actors involved. In addition, we perused a wide range of documents, which included court records of relevant cases.

The international literature
Security access restriction is by no means only a South African phenomenon, although the scale of the phenomenon may be greater in large South African cities than in most other parts of the world. In the academic literature it is the US experience with gating that has received the most attention, with the classic text on gated communities being Blakely and Snyder's *Fortress America: Gated Communities in the United States* (1998). For Blakely and Snyder, gated communities represent a further twist in the evolution of the suburban ideal and are part of the broad trend towards privatisation and enclosure of space that is manifested in many other ways in the city.

Blakely and Snyder empathise with the residents of gated communities. They note that the fear that drives people into gated communities is very real and that the desires of residents in gated communities are understandable: "they want to control crime and traffic; they want to be free of strangers, disruptions, intrusion; they want privacy, stability, peace of mind, familiarity" (1998, page 143). However, they insist that in considering gated communities one must go beyond the benefits that accrue immediately to residents and consider what the gates mean for society at large. They find that gated communities are a symbol of the underlying tensions in the social fabric. When combined with patterns of racial and economic segregation, income polarisation, and exclusionary land-use practices, gated communities represent another form of division and exclusion.

From a pragmatic perspective, Blakely and Snyder also point out that many of the intended effects of security access restriction are not achieved. Although there is a widespread belief that gates do work in terms of crime reduction, the empirical
evidence is inconclusive; also, the relationship between gating and the promotion of community spirit and cohesion is double edged, and the impacts of gating on movement patterns in the city is a matter of concern. This was also pointed out by Wilson-Doenges (2000), who showed, through empirical work, that although the perceptions of risk may be reduced by gating, actual crime rates are often not significantly altered. Helsley and Strange (1999) also reached uncertain conclusions in their modeling of crime rates; they concluded that gating generally does have a deterrent effect on crime but that there are instances in which gating may actually increase overall crime rates.

Blakely and Snyder's real concern, however, is not with the effects of gated communities on crime and other local concerns such as traffic, community cohesion within enclosed areas, and property values, but rather with the cumulative effects of gated communities on societal values and relationships. Although Blakely and Snyder's empathetic but nevertheless disapproving take on gating is influential, there are strong proponents of the gated community. Foldavry (1994), for example, argued from a neoclassical perspective that gates are the most efficient way of ensuring that collectively consumed goods (for example, security) are provided by the market.

Since Blakely and Snyder's work a fairly spirited debate has emerged that has extended beyond the borders of the USA. In 2001, for example, a symposium on gated communities, at the University of Mainz, Germany, discussed the experience of gating in Puerto Rico, Argentina, Venezuela, Russia, Spain, Portugal, Turkey, Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, and elsewhere. Gating is a widespread phenomenon, although it does take different forms in different places. In Saudi Arabia, for example, gating means compounds where mainly foreigners from the West reside, whereas in Caracas, Venezuela, where the crime rates are similar to, if not higher than, those in Johannesburg, the wealthier citizens of the city live in high-security compounds, behind high walls and razor wire. For Webster et al, guest editors of a special edition of Environment and Planning B: Planning and Design, gated communities represent a "new genre of modern urban habitat" that may "challenge the spatial, organisational, and institutional order that has shaped modern cities" (2002, page 315). Webster et al were cautious in making value judgments, simply pointing out that gated communities represent a new form of 'territorial organisation' of which some are critical and others consider to be a "positive evolutionary step, delivering civic services more efficiently" (page 319).

Largely through the work of Webster, gated communities are now a subject of academic debate in the United Kingdom, although levels of security access restriction are still very low in comparison with those in countries such as the USA and South Africa, and it is not at all certain whether the United Kingdom will follow trends in these countries. Webster (2001; 2002) approaches the question of gated communities by challenging conventional views of public goods, the public realm, and public domain. Webster argues that we can no longer refer only to public and private realms, as the distinctions between the two are now thoroughly blurred. We should also now recognise the existence of an in-between realm, the club realm, in which proprietary communities act together to share certain communal facilities and provide certain services (for example, security) that the public sector does not supply to the extent that is required. As there is a form of user payment there is a level of exclusion, although not to the extent one would have in the purely private realm. Webster takes a very pragmatic view on the emergence of the club realm, arguing that "the club realm is here to stay and that private developers and town planners alike need to design and plan with it just as they have traditionally designed and planned with public and private realms" (2001, page 149). Another contribution from the United Kingdom comes from Gooblar (2004), who argues that the British planning system is unprepared
for the impacts of gated communities and who also points to the effects of gating on surrounding communities.

A further challenge to conventional wisdom on gating and urban fragmentation is emerging from Latin America. The generally accepted progressive position that gated communities necessarily lead to urban fragmentation and heightened social cleavage is questioned by Salcedo and Torres (2003), for example, who argue that without gated communities Latin American cities would be more segregated. Ironically, gating keeps wealthier citizens closer to their poorer neighbours and, although there may be little social mixing, the proximity assists the poor in terms of jobs, consumption, and other forms of economic activity.

The record of uncertainty, conflicting public policy, and conflict around the issue is especially well developed in the USA. In cities such as Los Angeles, Houston, Miami, and Chicago, and also in a number of smaller places, there have been bitter battles over attempts to gate communities. Supporters of gated communities point to lower crime rates, better traffic control, improved community spirit, and enhanced property values. Opponents argue that gates do not produce the intended results, that they lead to displacement of crime and traffic problems, are socially divisive and exclusionary, and are linked to deeply entrenched racism and class prejudice. Although the number of gated communities in the USA is on the increase there is a minority of cities where the trend is in the opposite direction. Gates are banned or strongly discouraged in cities such as Sante Fe, (California), Dallas (where 100% resident approval is required before a street can be enclosed), Minneapolis, Portland, Sacramento, Fort Collins (Colorado), and in many smaller localities, often on the grounds that they are disruptive to a sense of community (Blakely and Snyder, 1998; Landman, 2000a; Los Angeles Times 20 September 1990). In some of these cities, alternatives to closures—such as crime prevention through environmental design, community policing, residents’ patrols, and safe-home programmes—are being encouraged. Alternatively, some communities are going for ‘soft gates’ that monitor but do not bar access to vehicles. Clearly, even in relatively safe cities (in terms of international comparison), the question of banning or actively discouraging gating is highly contentious. The desire to protect the integrity of public space confronts the real fears of urban citizens.

Although the literature on gated communities is very recent and is still an emerging area of debate there are other more established bodies of literature of significance to a discussion on security access restriction. The first is the literature on the ‘fortress city’, ‘carceral city’, or ‘panoptic city’ that was initially inspired by Foucault’s appropriation of Jeremy Bentham’s design of an 18th-century prison—the panopticon—as the metaphor for contemporary spatial organisation (see Foucault, 1977). Davis took up the theme in his now famous book, City of Quartz (1990), in which he identified the gated community with the fortress or panoptic city. There is now a fairly substantial literature on fear in the city and on responses to this fear (for example, see Bannister and Fyfe, 2001; Body-Gendrot, 2001; Marcuse, 1997).

Further significant literature deals with the ‘privatisation of public space’, a phrase we use here primarily to denote physical space in which public interaction can readily occur, that is provided and maintained by public authorities, and that is ‘open to the public’ rather than closed to certain classes of users. As indicated above, Webster (2001; 2002) has drawn on concepts of the public and private realms, and the blurring of the two, to develop his approach to gated communities in the United Kingdom, which is generally supportive (or, at least, tolerant) of the idea of gating. Other literature, however, suggests that gating is part of a broader, and deeply problematic, trend that has to do with the erosion of the public domain, also referred to as ‘collective space’ (for example, see Boyer, 1996; Goheen, 1998; Massey, 2003; Mitchell, 1995; Patton,
This work suggests that the 'sociality of places' is undermined by increasing surveillance and growing control over movement and how the public sphere is diminished as spaces that were previously public are enclosed and privatised or semiprivatised. As Patton points out, defining the right to presence in the parks, paths, and streets of the city is "highly political because it legisitates who counts as the public and who is allowed to be part of the community" (2000, page 183). In the South African context similar issues have been raised (Mabin, 2001) regarding several 'public' physical spaces, including Sandton Square in the northern suburbs of Johannesburg, where private development has created perhaps the most used, superficially 'public', open space in the area, although behind the façade extensive security, and, ultimately, 'right of admission reserved' haunts the space. In a context of limited municipal capital budgets, public development of anything like similar public spaces has seemed improbable; even the nearby local public park has recently come under the management of a 'city improvement district', the local equivalent of a 'business improvement district', similarly placing surveillance and even admission in essentially private hands.

Writers such as Sennett (1994) and Boyer (1996) express regret at the diminished commitment to the public sphere and concern at how meaningless the notion of the public domain is becoming, but writers such as Zukin (1995) show also that the boundary between the public and private domains is always being renegotiated and that the ideas of public and private space are deeply ambiguous. The work by Webster (2001; 2002) and also by Glasze (for example, Glasze, 2003) and others has taken this further by showing how a hybrid realm—the so-called club realm—has come into existence. These intellectual debates are not insignificant; how public space and the public realm are defined is critical to deciding on the right to closure. It may provide a justification for closure (for example, Webster, 2001; 2002) or provide the motivation to resist closure (for example, Davis, 1990).

In a city such as Johannesburg, where there is a legacy of division and balkanisation on the basis of race and ethnicity, the sensitivities over the apparent privatisation of the public realm are especially acute. Here, questions around the integrity of the public realm—and of security access restriction more specifically—are enmeshed in debates around social exclusion, racism, and elitist practices. Terms such as 'crime prevention', 'traffic control', and 'maintaining property values' are understandably suspected of being code words for racism although, as we will show, the ways in which the tensions are played out are not always predictable.

South African research
In South Africa the most substantial research into the gated community phenomenon to date has been conducted by a researcher at the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), Karina Landman, whose initial conclusions were almost identical to those provided by Blakely and Snyder (1998), although she did recognise particular features of the South Africa context such as the low levels of trust in the police in many communities, a heritage of racially fragmented and separated urban environments, and notorious extremes between rich and poor (Landman, 2000b, page 18). In more recent work, however, Landman has taken a far more contextually specific approach. Landman (2004) draws on a wider literature than previously and makes a strong attempt to link policy proposals for dealing with gated communities to new systems of planning in South Africa, especially integrated development planning. In this way she is prompting local authorities in South Africa to link their policies on gated communities to the longer term objectives for urban development contained in strategy documents such as integrated development plans. Landman also urges local and provincial authorities to take a clear
policy approach. For her, the conflict and confusion that have characterised the issue of gated communities stems less from the specific positions taken on gating than from the weak and confusing messages given to citizens by local authorities.

Although the bulk of the work on the subject has come from Landman, a few other (less policy-oriented) contributions may be noted. Hook and Vrdoljak (2002), for example, looked at a large, purpose-built, and expensive security village, Dainfern, rather than neighbourhoods retrofitted with security access restriction. They explored Dainfern (figure 1) through a Foucauldian lens, arguing that this gated community is an example of a heterotopia, a space with an alternative mode of social ordering that contests and subverts sociospatial relations in broader society. Jürgens and Gnad (2002a; 2002b) compared two developments, each development, like Dainfern, purpose-built as a gated community, one occupied predominantly by white people and the other, interestingly, occupied predominantly by black people. They concluded, perhaps fancifully, that we may see the different ethnic groups in South Africa creating their own gated communities—ethnic enclaves that would represent new forms of class and racial segregation. Thus they point to the potentially far-reaching effects of new forms of social and territorial organisation that the gated community represents, a point previously made by Bremner (1999), who noted that younger populations may see the new forms as 'normal'. Robins (2004) also takes a Foucauldian perspective, focusing on the city of Cape Town and dealing with "new forms of spatial governmentality after apartheid" (page 665). Although Robins refers to the different forms of security in the fortress-like middle-class suburbs of South African cities, he provides an important additional perspective by showing how the state is attempting to reassert control in the crime and gangster ridden working-class areas of the city.

Figure 1. Gateway of Dainfern security village, at the northern edge of Johannesburg suburbia (photograph: P Harrison).
The Johannesburg case

The setting in which this work has been conducted is one in which a large city is experiencing change of all kinds—economically, politically, in social relations, in its geography, and to its position to the world—changes that create extraordinary opportunities and also anxieties. The society in which the city exists happens to be one of the world’s more unequal, from the perspective of income and wealth. There is a history of division, much but not all of it imposed in pursuit of Apartheid policy until less than a decade ago. In this setting it is not surprising that radically different views exist on the means, both individual and collective, of addressing the problems that confront citizens. Among those means (effective or otherwise) is the practice of security access restriction, accomplished mostly by gating and the fencing of neighbourhoods. As the process of doing so interferes with free use of public rights-of-way, including roads and pavements (sidewalks), and as the law gives local government some powers in these areas as well as the responsibility to maintain roads, the policy and practice of local government with regard to access restriction are central to the issue and are, of course, political matters.

The city has recently become the subject of a number of new works, among which those by Beavon (2004), Mbembe and Nuttall (2004), Tomlinson et al (2003), Beall et al (2002), Bernstein and McCarthy (2002), and Guillaume (2001) are noteworthy and useful in describing elements of the present dilemmas of governance. None yet addresses in detail the political situation in Johannesburg, which is a critical part of the contest over access restriction. Indeed, from a dispassionate perspective, access restriction has become a hotly contested issue in the city, with different groupings vociferously and, on occasion, even violently pitched against one another.

No glib assumptions should be made about the politics of closure. We learnt that some councillors from the supposedly more conservative parties in the council oppose road closure, and some councillors from the ruling party are proclosure. Councillors also change their minds. In addition, it is necessary to locate a discussion on security access restriction in terms of the severe realities of crime in what has been termed ‘Fortress Johannesburg’ (Lipman and Harris, 1999). Although issues relating to the integrity of public space and urban integration are of deep concern, the enormous problem of crime in this city is also a pressing matter for public policy.

Crime in the city

Body-Gendrot (2001) asks whether perceptions of crime in the city are objective or ‘fantasmatic’ (page 920). She questions whether urban fears in Europe, and even North America, are grounded in reality, and suggests that perceptions of urban danger are often the result of manipulation. However, she does acknowledge that countries in transition, such as South Africa, have crime rates that are extraordinarily high when compared with Europe and North America and that her argument regarding the manipulation of reality cannot easily be applied in these circumstances.

For a proper perspective on crime in South Africa it is necessary to have some sense of international comparison. Comparative international crime statistics are unfortunately notoriously unreliable, as different countries have very different definitions of crime, and, more significantly, rates of reporting of crime vary dramatically. Perhaps the best indicator for comparative purposes is the homicide rate, as most murders in most countries are reported even if other forms of crime are not, although homicide rates are not the ideal surrogate for all types of crime (ISS, 2001). It is clear from the statistics presented in table 1 that the homicide rate in South Africa is similar to those in the more crime-ridden parts of Latin America but is massively higher than those in other parts of the world.
Table 1. Homicide rates for selected countries, in descending order, 2000 (source: UNODC, 2003).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Homicides per 100,000 population</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td>62.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td>51.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamaica</td>
<td>33.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Venezuela</td>
<td>33.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russian Federation</td>
<td>19.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>14.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latvia</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Czech Republic</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chile</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>0.5</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Within South Africa there are huge regional differences in crime, and the homicide rate listed in table 1 is simply the national average. Johannesburg, South Africa's major urban concentration, has the highest crime rates in the country. Crime rates in different categories for Johannesburg are usually between two and five times the national average (table 2).

It is possible that even in Johannesburg fear of crime is manipulated and exaggerated in relation to objective realities (as argued, for example, by Shaw and Gastrow, 2001), but there can be no doubt that violence and crime present a real and serious set of problems for this city (for further discussion on crime in South Africa and Johannesburg, see Louw et al, 1998; Schönteich and Louw, 2001; Shaw, 2002).

It is because the majority of people living in Johannesburg feel 'very unsafe' (see the perception survey reported by ISS, 2000) and because public policing remains highly inadequate that many residents (and, of course, businesses) spend considerable sums on private security. However, it should be noted that there is a great imbalance between the risk of falling victim to crime and the ability to buy protection. Although crime is a problem throughout the city, the main victims of crime are not the affluent white population whose fears are so widely publicised but rather the African poor. It is significant, for example, that the homicide rate per 100,000 population in the inner-city

Table 2. Levels of reported crime in Johannesburg compared with the average for the Republic of South Africa as a whole; official statistics, 2001 (source: SAPS, 2003).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Incidence per 100,000 in</th>
<th>Johannesburg</th>
<th>South Africa</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Residential house-breaking</td>
<td>1986.8</td>
<td>688.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theft of motor vehicles</td>
<td>1989.0</td>
<td>228.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murder</td>
<td>124.8</td>
<td>49.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robbery with aggravating circumstances</td>
<td>1855.6</td>
<td>251.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rape</td>
<td>213.4</td>
<td>120.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assault with intent to do grievous bodily harm</td>
<td>1005.6</td>
<td>624.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
areas for 2001, which are now almost entirely occupied by black Africans, was 603 per 100,000, twelve times the national rate and almost five times the rate for Johannesburg as a whole. Lipman and Harris (1999, page 727) write of the “impregnable zones of razor-wire, snapping guard dogs, manned sentry boxes and electronic security systems”, but these forms of private security are still largely a feature of the mainly white suburban areas rather than of the so-called townships and inner-city areas where real crime rates are higher.

Security access restriction and local government

It is not surprising in the context of Johannesburg’s high crime rates that many individuals and groups have sought to go beyond barring access within the boundaries of single businesses or residences (as described by Lipman and Harris, 1999) to restrict right of entry to public spaces. The first wave of security access restriction in recent times had to do with the purpose-built cluster of units behind walls and gates, which in some cases reaches a large scale, as at Dainfern and at Fourways Gardens in Johannesburg. In the past decade, however, there has been a dramatic escalation in the restriction of access to roads through areas that were not originally designed to be ‘walled off’. It is specifically the act of restricting access to public roads in this second category that receives attention in this paper.

As the sphere of government responsible for maintaining public roads—indeed, as the legal custodian of road reserves within its boundaries—municipal government has faced difficult choices in addressing attempts at security access restriction. These attempts have come from many parts of the city, mostly in areas regarded as being wealthier residential but also in such places as Dobsonville, part of the Soweto complex of historically ‘black townships’, and industrial zones.

Landman (2000b) reported 360 gated communities in the eastern substructure of the Johannesburg Metropolitan area, where most of the road closures were concentrated, and observed that the number of closures ‘were growing daily’. In July 2003 maps provided by the Johannesburg Roads Agency indicated nearly 600 gated communities (with more than 1100 booms) in the Johannesburg Metropolitan Area (see figure 2, over), the majority of which are classified as illegal. This was an understatement of the actual amount, as the survey of illegal booms had not been completed. Most of the road closures were concentrated in the relatively wealthy northeastern quadrant of the city, with the suburb of Bryanston alone having sixty-four enclosures, and Morningside fifty three. There were, however, a scattering of enclosures throughout the city, with a relatively high concentration in suburbs closer to the inner city, such as Jeppetown and Observatory, near to where the most rapid urban changes have occurred over the past decade. There were five enclosures in Soweto and fourteen in the Indian township of Lenasia. Thus, although enclosures are predominantly located in upper-middle-income to higher-income suburbs, there are a number of exceptions.

Johannesburg’s problem with security access restriction

Johannesburg came face to face with the need to develop policy on the restriction of road access for security reasons more or less at the same time as the dawn of democracy in South Africa. Before Johannesburg was brought under the control of a single metropolitan city council at the end of 2000 the various local authorities within Greater Johannesburg went their separate ways in the development of policy on security access restriction. The Southern Local Council, for example, which included Soweto and other former segregated black areas, received relatively few demands for, and appears to have been completely opposed to, security access restriction. The Eastern Local Council faced the most difficult conditions, with literally hundreds of applications for security access restrictions, and in dealing with the applications it took
Figure 2. Gated areas in the City of Johannesburg, 2004 (source: JRA, 2004). Reproduced by kind permission of C Bénit.
a relatively liberal, but often inconsistent, line. Most contemporary gated areas, both legal and illegal, are in this former area.

Although during the 1990s local authorities attempted to develop policies to guide decisionmaking on security access restriction, the policy process has been slow and fraught with conflict. Because neither national nor provincial government has set a framework of policy to make it easy for local government to confront the question, and perhaps also because the politics of the issue tend to be locally defined, local authorities (Johannesburg included) find themselves having to address this complex issue on their own.

In Johannesburg’s province of Gauteng there was initial uncertainty whether existing legislation permitted road closures. To clarify the position a chapter enabling a local authority to close roads for the purposes of public security was included in the Rationalisation of Public Affairs Act, Number 10, of 1998. It provides for municipalities to consider and, if certain procedures are followed and conditions met, to ‘restrict access’ to ‘any public place’. The act does not appear to define the meaning of ‘restrict access’, though the meaning is exceedingly important to its implementation and even to its constitutionality. It would seem that, strictly speaking, denying access to a public place is contrary to the law and the constitution and that the most that ‘security access restriction’ can mean in South Africa is stopping a person in order to record their identity and to monitor movement past or within particular places or areas.

In general, policies adopted by local councils require an application process that includes advertising the intention to close the road, receiving and reviewing objections, consulting with the police, and undertaking traffic impact studies. Most local authorities require proof that a substantial proportion of residents support the application, the required percentage varying from 66.6% to 90%. Most local authorities also require the homeowners’ association that is making the application to close off a street to establish a nonprofit company to handle the collection and administration of fees (Landman, 2000b). A key variation in policy relates to whether or not the management of an enclosed area should be under private or public control, and especially as to whether the local authority or a homeowners’ association should take responsibility for the maintenance and servicing of the area. In Johannesburg policies—such as that of the former Eastern Local Council—tended to insist that all road closures be temporary, be approved for a period of only a year, and that the public spaces within such areas clearly remain public property and be managed as such.

Since the end of 2000 the City of Johannesburg has been structured very differently from the city previously, as there has been a single metropolitan council with no local councils, raising for the first time the possibility of a consistent policy across the city. After the municipal election of 2000 city officials did in fact draft a new policy on security access restriction. This was, however, a bulky and complex document that approached the issue of road closures from an overwhelmingly technical perspective. It was underlain by an assumption that if technical concerns could be addressed there was no reason not to agree to closures. The longer-term impacts on human rights and on the form and function of the city were left to fester.

The draft policy lay dormant for nearly two years and, pending the finalisation of the new policy, there was a moratorium on applications. As a consequence, existing closures that had been endorsed by preexisting administrations became strictly illegal, as all had been approved as temporary measures. The other consequence of this prevarication was that some took matters into their own hands and built fences and gates in their neighborhoods without reference to the council.

However, as legal contests between residents became more common, including occasional incidents of violence between those who wanted their streets gated and
those who did not, the council was forced to confront the issue. Questions were raised as to whether it was desirable that those with financial means should be able to secure closures whereas those without could not. A more pragmatic concern was with the long-term costs to the city—financial and political—of continued piecemeal closure.

We conducted research during this period on behalf of the planners in the City of Johannesburg administration to assist them to arrive at a rapid assessment of the nature of the impact and functioning of road closures, not to make a measurement of the impact and functioning of such closures.

The research was undertaken primarily through thirty-six interviews with individuals in different sectors of interest, including with councillors, city officials, police, representatives from residents’ associations, and a selection of individuals working within or close to gated areas. Some of the key findings are indicated below.\(^{(1)}\)

Through the research it became clear that security access restrictions take very different forms in Johannesburg (for example, see figures 1, 3, and 4), and have a diversity of impacts, making it difficult to generate common policy. For example, the policy operates in business areas as well as in residential areas, and restricted areas vary in terms of their size, layout, and design, having quite different outcomes for mobility and the nature of exclusion. There is also a range of incomes within and across the spectrum of enclosed areas, although there can be no doubt that the tendency is in the direction of relatively high incomes. There is also considerable variety in terms of the actual practice of restriction, varying from soft forms, such as monitoring of traffic, to the actual physical barring of motorised and pedestrian access. From the

\(^{(1)}\) The original report is available from us on request.
interviews it became apparent that the extent to which security access restrictions ‘works’ depends very much on factors such as location, road layout, and whether there are through-roads.

In terms of impact, the primary concern is with levels of crime. Our research did suggest a widespread agreement among residents in gated communities, and among the police, that there is a reduction of crime in these areas, and especially of serious crime such as car hijacking and armed robbery. However, the problem of displaced crime was also noted by the police, who indicated that the displacement may not necessarily be to neighbouring communities but may well be to areas further away. It is difficult to be precise about the impact on property values. The higher prices, up to a 40% premium in value (according to informants in the real-estate business), are in the custom-built, private, gated communities, and not in the retrofitted communities, although we were informed that insurance premiums in some of the retrofitted areas have dropped considerably since closure.

It is often suggested that gating, or otherwise enclosing areas of the city, tends to increase community activity and cohesion. This being South Africa after the formal end of racial residential segregation, questions regarding the impact of street closures and gating on the pattern of integration and segregation will necessarily be posed. Real-estate agents say wealthier black people are fleeing into enclosures as enthusiastically as are white people, though this proposition remains to be tested.

Much more generally than issues of race, however, there can be no doubt that there have been conflicts that have emerged before the gates went up, after they went up, within the areas of application, and across lines between such areas and those neighbouring them. There have been conflicts between those excluded and security guards, conflicts between officials (and sometimes police) and residents over removal
of illegal gates and fences, and conflicts over the finances and management of security access restriction bodies. Each interview informant in our research project had stories and anecdotes to tell concerning conflict situations. It would appear that conflict has been characteristic of many security access restriction situations—but certainly not all.

It is also important to consider the impact of security access controls on the urban experience of the broader society—that is, those individuals and groups who are not immediately affected by these measures but whose appreciation of the city is affected by the measures. The sheer number of gated communities in Johannesburg means that they are increasingly visible and are impinging on the lives of a growing number of people. The most obvious effect for many of us is that it is more difficult or inconvenient to move around the suburbs and, to a greater or lesser extent, we do feel a sense of exclusion from many neighbourhoods. Gates are a visual reminder of crime and insecurity and may feed the fear (whether justified or not) that detracts so badly from our appreciation of life in Johannesburg.

However, for most middle-class white suburbanities, barriers and gates may be little more than an irritant—perhaps a minor obstacle to a Sunday afternoon drive. As Blakely and Snyder (1998, page 2) wrote of their US experience with access control: "a tie, a suit, and a nice car were often enough to be waved past". More significant is the extent to which other classes and races may be affected. To what extent do individuals in these categories feel alienated (even humiliated) as they attempt to move through the city on legitimate business or to seek access to public services and resources?

It is clearly impossible to write objectively of the impact of security access restriction on the 'feel of the city'. From our limited discussions with different individuals it is apparent that gated communities evoke very different, and sometimes quite strong, emotions among different individuals and groups in the city. To provide a 'global view' of attitudes and feelings would require a large, well-structured perception study. To some extent it is possible to predict the responses of various groups, although not always. Initially, for example, we thought that domestic workers might feel alienated by security access controls, but our informants (including some domestic workers) have pointed out that these workers are often strongly in support of these security measures, as a domestic worker alone in a house during the day often feels very vulnerable to crime.

Towards a policy
By the beginning of 2003 the need for a policy response from the city council was becoming acute, especially given the increasing number of legal actions being taken both by those wanting to enclose an area (for example, action against the council, for procrastination) and by those opposed to enclosure (for example, against organisations involved in extralegal acts of street closing). However, the politics of access restriction were complex. For the most part, formal council politics are dominated by the African National Congress (ANC), which holds about 60% of council seats, harried by its opposition, most prominently the Democratic Alliance (DA) inside the council, and groups outside the council on the left flank of the ANC.

The groups on the political left criticise the ANC leadership for allegedly forgetting constituencies of poorer people who face inadequate water supply, sanitation, energy supply, transport provision, and housing delivery (Bond, 2000; Ngwane, 2003), but they conspicuously avoid the violence and crime issue, which probably affects poorer groups more severely than anyone else in the city. On the other side, the DA is apparently more conservative than is the ANC, as well as noticeably 'whiter', and at least appears to campaign on behalf of constituencies that have substantial property to protect
from crime. Both nationally and locally the DA is vociferous in its criticism of the alleged failure of government institutions to protect citizens from crime and violence.

However, the cleavages around security access restriction do not follow just these divides. One finds, for example, ANC supporters in some neighbourhoods strongly in favour of access restriction, and also the DA supporting residents campaigning against the 'closure' of their suburbs. One also hears the (ANC) Council Executive anxiously calling for access restriction in industrial areas to protect factories from crime (The Star 12 April 2003). Because of the nonalignment of these fractures with 'normal' political division, the access restriction issue has become exceedingly difficult for the ANC to handle in power in the Johannesburg Council.

The commitment of the ANC regime to economic growth, and therefore to formal investment, greatly strengthens its concern with dealing with violence and crime, key elements in helping to foster growth, and it has thus become far more politically acceptable within the ANC to express support for various anticrime and antiviolence measures that previously were associated with the DA. There is also the growing tendency of ordinary (ANC-voting) black citizens to compare the (dangerous and crime ridden) present with the (safer and more controlled) past—fully acknowledging the horrors of Apartheid but mourning the loss of allegedly effective policing and strongly criticising present powers for failure in this area. Also, the ANC is a broad church and is certainly not purely a party of the disadvantaged. Indeed, its prominent members are very much among the (new) elite of South African society—and just like bourgeois citizens in other parts of the world their concerns include safety and security of themselves, their property, and their investments. However, the ANC is also projected as the party of liberty in South Africa, and privatisation of public space must be anathema to many of its supporters. The management of these tensions presented a huge challenge and arguably hobbled rapid response to the gating and fencing of the streets of the city. Given the diversity of positions within the ANC in Johannesburg, and also the pressures from other groups, it would have been extremely difficult for the council to have taken a position either strongly for or against closure. At the same time, a neutral policy, or a policy simply dictated by technical objectives, was becoming increasingly untenable—a spate of court cases was forcing the council to declare its position. The choice for the city council was essentially somewhere between a strong 'yes' and a strong 'no' position. Given the potential for conflict around the issue there was also a compelling need to build some form of consensus around the emergent policy, and in the early months of 2003 there was relatively wide consultation with a variety of representatives of interests for and against security access restriction.

By early 2003 it had become apparent that the council was tilting towards the 'no' position and away from the largely technocratic view of security access restriction that had given the city a 'yes' tilt since its creation in 2000. Initially, it was largely the rhetoric of the city that was pitched against enclosures, but eventually the council made its first clear intervention—a decision to remove all booms and fences that had been illegally erected. However, this action against illegal gating was tempered by the adoption of a policy that provided a process for obtaining permission to erect such barriers. The ANC-controlled metropolitan Johannesburg Council has therefore finally taken a position—one in which it attempts to discourage security access restriction but which nevertheless provides a mechanism for accommodating such restrictions in circumstances where they do not have a major negative effect on the functioning of the city. The policy has a 'no' tilt, but is not far from the middle point of the spectrum.

The council evidences a political willingness to implement its policies. A deadline was provided for the removal of illegal booms, gates, and fences, or for applications for
the regularisation of these barriers. By the time the deadline had expired, applications to legalise 655 barriers had been received, but 556 barriers were still illegally in place, without any application for their legalisation, and the council began removing them (JRA, 2003).

A primary area of difference between the technical officials' draft of 2001 and the new city policy may be found in relation to explanation of the intent of the policy. No longer is this merely a matter of management costs; it is also a question of the nature of the city in the medium to longer term. The policy is clear that security access restriction is not the preferred long-term solution. As a result, there has been a new framing of much more substantial conditions, well beyond the technical ones that form the major focus of the earlier policy draft. The implementation of the new policy will not bring security access restriction to an end but it will probably mean a significant reduction in the number of enclosed areas (although it may mean a further increase in the number of purpose-built enclosed communities). The policy is perhaps the only politically feasible solution for a council that is broadly opposed to gating, as a firm rejection of gating could have led to growing confrontation with well-resourced groups demanding rights to closure and would have required massive political will and administrative and physical capacity to defeat those confronting city regulation. The realities of crime in the city would have made it difficult to have taken a strong 'no' position on the matter, yet the spread of constituencies prevented a simple 'yes' route being followed.

Concluding thoughts
In the City of Johannesburg, as in many political institutions, elected councillors and appointed officials spend large amounts of their time in attempting to resolve apparently deep contradictions. A particularly acute example is provided by the access restriction policy of the city—a policy that has lurched from difficulty to difficulty in the attempt to find a 'sufficient consensus' on practice.

The relationship of the gating issue to real and perceived crime, to the provision of urban services, and to deepening income inequalities offers substantial areas for possibly controversial research and urban theory. Given the difficulties of such issues, and their often divisive nature, a policy process that allows the relevant parties to reach consensus built upon an informed basis, obviously, is required. But it is not necessarily enough. Whether Johannesburg succeeds in its new policy remains to be seen (for example, from the point of view of reducing conflict). The city will continue to provide an example of the difficulties of managing contradictions in local governance. Policy in contested terrain is unlikely to be stable. It will require continuous monitoring and evaluation. Our views, formed on the basis of research in one city in particular, will certainly not be the last word on gating.

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