



Welfare, crime and society

Gated communities: socialness and social retreat

VOICE OVER COMMENTARY

Since the end of Apartheid in South Africa and the first democratic elections in 1994, the country has been in political and social transition. This period of transition and change has been marked by series of contradictions.

On the one hand there's been increasing social inclusion, programmes of social welfare interventions and a growing black middle class. On the other hand it has witnessed rising levels of poverty, unemployment and crime. For many this has fed into a sense of insecurity and uncertainty and some of this is reflected in the rapid rise of gated community living.

Cape Town is a multicultural, multiethnic city with a population of over 3 million. Located at the tip of South Africa, it's a popular residential area and a key tourist destination.

Like other South African cities Cape Town has experienced a dramatic rise in crime and increasingly the city's residents are looking at ways to protect themselves.

CLIFFORD SITONGA

I suppose that what informs the proliferation of these gated communities is the perception of crime. That if people are living in those gated communities, they will be safe.

BARBARA SOUTHWORTH

I think there are a range of, of what people define as 'gated communities'. I think some of the literature talks about enclosed neighbourhoods and then gated communities. So enclosed neighbourhoods be existing neighbourhoods where people have started to put up barriers and fences and boom gates and things like that. Those aren't very common in Cape Town, they're much more common in Johannesburg. And then there's actually what, I think what we know as gated communities are, tend to be the private developments, where there are walled complexes quite often around golf courses or the latest one is gentlemen's estates, equestrian villages. They have all sorts of, of lifestyle connotations associated within, but essentially they have walls and gates and controlled access.

I think that a lot of these gated communities they, they're marketing obviously a lifestyle, they're marketing aspirations. And a lot of them are, are around the issues of suburbia and this notion of being landed gentry and I'm not sure what it is that people, that triggers things in people's, people's heads, but I think they're also marketing to, to people's fears and anxieties.

VOICE OVER COMMENTARY

Atlantic Beach is one of the new-style, large-scale gated communities being built around Cape Town. Still under construction it will number 850 houses when it's complete and will be the third largest gated community in South Africa. The estate is built around a golf course and other leisure facilities. It's run by a tenants' association who employ estate manager Chris Van Wyck.

CHRIS VAN WYCK

I look after the, the affairs of the association which starts by the administration, also the maintenance of all the infrastructure – the roads, the security, landscaping – and then the liaison with the home-owners. There's no rule or defined definition on who buys here, it's, it's mostly about who can afford it. So it doesn't really matter what race you are, doesn't really matter who you are, if you can afford to buy a property here, you live here.

At any given time there'll be about 3000 people on the estate, that's excluding golfers, that's only residents and their visitors.

Well, this is the view why many people buy and pay the prices for these properties because you can see Table Mountain in the background, you can see the golf course and that's what it's all about. That's why people invest here.

LIEZE

I love it. I don't want to stay anywhere else. I just absolutely love it. I feel very safe here and of course my kids can play outside.

This is our living area, where we have our fun, and our kids play and do their homework and we cook and clean and jump around. Yeah.

LIEZE'S HUSBAND

We've made quite a lot of friends, new friends obviously from the security estate. I've got some family and stuff that stay here.

LIEZE

My parents stay down the road, so that's very convenient for me. I have a friend that stays on the other side and you get together. Come around like four in the afternoon and you put them in the pram or the bicycles and you go for a walk and you just meet other people and you get to know more people like that. So yah ...

VOICE OVER COMMENTARY

This sense of community is actively encouraged and facilitated in Atlantic Beach.

CHRIS VAN WYCK

We understand and we believe that there's a need for the community to interact. And just by human nature, people living far apart won't naturally just you know, become friends or just know each other. Atlantic Beach has got 15 villages on the estate. We've got an intervillage challenge once a year, whereby we invite people from different villages and they will compete in a golf competition, a fun day for the family. Generally we end the day with a party and we will announce the, the winner for that year – which village is the winner for that specific year.

VOICE OVER COMMENTARY

John and Shirley moved to Atlantic Beach from Cape Town three years ago to bring up their young family.

JOHN

It's like a holiday resort for us. We come home, we don't have the pressures of ... of worrying about security. I travel a lot so I get home and when I'm away I know that Shirley and the boys are safe. So ...

SECURITY GUARD

Basically this is the control room and this is where we monitor the whole of the estate. We've got plus/minus 50 cameras on the estate itself and that is on the fences as well. The control room is monitored or manned 24 hours a day. All the complaints of the residents are coming first via to the control room.

If I see something that's not supposed to happen I tell the guy that's automatically doing duty on that specific point and he must go and investigate.

VOICE OVER COMMENTARY

As well as the CCTV cameras there are three security gates around the estate controlled by guards. Visitors are required to sign in and out. Residents and employees can only enter the estate if they've been registered on the biometric fingerprinting database.

CHRIS

This gentleman is not on the system yet and he's coming to do a delivery on the estate so what we're going to do is we're going to register him now so that he can move in and out as a contractor ... [speaking Afrikaans] Put your finger on there. Leave it ... We know all his particulars and we also know to which building site he's going to go. So you can go. Thank you.

SHIRLEY (JOHN'S WIFE)

If I do feel uncomfortable or unsafe I can just pick up the phone and literally two minutes the security guard will be there. And it's just great to be able to go to bed at night when I'm on my own and not have to worry about whether have I set the alarm, have I shut the window? And I don't: I sleep, the windows are open, the doors are open. I absolutely love it. I think I would really struggle to live outside of a secure estate.

SHIRLEY

Sheena? Someone I actually met through the gym. They've got a great little gym on the estate as well. So we would always meet, I would go with my sister, so we would meet at 6 or so in the morning.

Let's put this little hat on, Oz, there we go.

Hello, hello, how's it going?

You haven't seen Oz in a while, eh?

SHEENA

My husband works abroad 99 per cent of the time and we used to live in Hout Bay which is a gorgeous area, but the crime rates started coming, you know, became a huge issue. And it wasn't the little, the minor crime, but it was the harder stuff, there were rapes and murders and serious assaults.

We come here knowing that we feel safe. But coupled with that, for me, comes the idea that I'm living a life that 80 per cent of South Africans can't live, and, and that bothers me. It was a tough decision for us to make, because I'm acutely aware of what happens beyond the gates, and I think that just comes from, I'm obviously a lot darker than a lot of people who live on the estate, and I grew up in the, I'm 41 next year, so I grew up in the struggle.

I've started working a lot in Atlantis which is a township about 15 minutes from here and I would say a lot of the workers they all stay there ... and I would hazard a guess as to how many people have actually been to Atlantis, how many of the employers have actually been to Atlantis. It is a nightmare there. It is riddled with gangsterism and drugs and prostitution. For me it was a struggle driving through the gates every morning, and I see these women standing queuing, knowing exactly where they've come from. So I've made an effort to work beyond the gates, beyond the gates.

VOICE OVER COMMENTARY

Under apartheid townships such as Atlantis, Langaa and Kayelitsha were created on the Cape Flats to house migrant workers. Multi-ethnic areas of central Cape Town such as District Six were demolished in the 1960s and the so-called coloured populations were forcibly moved out to Mitchells Plain.

BARBARA SOUTHWORTH

We're dealing with a legacy where our cities were intentionally segregated. They were segregated through spatial and physical buffers – walls, freeways, railway lines and sort of buffer zones where entire bits of land were left open in order to create a buffer between communities.

So we sit with a legacy like that. And some of our earlier, earliest planning work and certainly my earliest planning work when I started with the city in 1999, or 1998 actually, was to try and come up with ways of dealing with integration and achieving integration, making connections between communities.

Moving away from poor planning where, where communities are incredibly internalised, very few access and egress points. A lot of that work that we were doing was to try and break down that, that segregation and insular kind of neighbourhood planning. And I suppose in a way that this, this concept of gated communities starts to ... it just recreates that and very much around a class and income basis. So in a way it's redoing apartheid in a different way, in a market-driven way.

CLIFFORD SITTONGA

That is the danger of gated communities, that they can reinforce that perception of excluded communities.

BARBARA SOUTHWORTH

Certainly the larger gated communities are really problematic in the way that they close off access between communities. Some of the coastal ones are particularly problematic in the way that they privatise huge stretches of coast. And so a lot of our work has been to counter those, and obviously you're fighting with very powerful forces.

VOICE OVER COMMENTARY

In response to these concerns, Cape Town City Council has recently adopted a policy to regulate the building of new gated communities and the retrospective gating of streets.

GIDEON BRAND

It's been important for this Council to make sure that it remains integrated and an accessible city to everybody that lives here and visits Cape Town, and if we don't implement a proper policy for it, I mean we're going to end up with a gated city at the end of the day and a, a barricaded city of large areas closed off and gated and not accessible for the ordinary person in the street.

As part of the policy, it also tries to promote various other options and, which could include neighbourhood watches or city improvement districts, or just patrols in the area, or it could just be CCTV, passive monitoring. What was interesting from our engagement with the public during this, during the development of this policy was also the, the poorer sections of a community and their take on it was basically that they want also more security in their environments.