



# Is Surveillance the Solution?

## Evaluating CCTV as a Strategy for Addressing Crime in Post-Apartheid Johannesburg, South Africa

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While business-booming Johannesburg has flourished since the fall of apartheid in 1994, the lasting effects of segregation, amongst other factors, have helped to maintain high levels of crime in the city. The Johannesburg Metropolitan Police admit that crime in general is a significant municipal issue, although recent and reliable statistics are generally unavailable to the public (City of Johannesburg 2015c). In response to this 'crime issue,' the Police Department introduced the Closed-Circuit Television Surveillance Project (CCTV) throughout the late 1990s and 2000s. The project has featured the ongoing implementation of surveillance cameras on street corners in Johannesburg's Central Business District, but the police do not specify which kinds of crimes it seeks to address in particular (City of Johannesburg, 2015). This article posits that while the CCTV project allows the Police Department to generally improve its policing functions, it is less successful in preventing crime due to the lack of specificity in its goals. Moreover, I argue that the project has rendered certain crimes invisible, especially sexual violence, by focusing on crimes that occur most often in public streets. The city has been dubbed the 'rape capital of Africa,' but it has received paucity of pol-

icy efforts and measures to combat the issue (Palmary, Rauch, and Simpson 2003:101). I thus contend that the CCTV project is focused on crimes perpetuated mainly against white, middle-upper class bodies, while rape crime that target women, and in most cases black women, are largely ignored.

### **Historical Background**

The sociopolitical landscape of post-apartheid Johannesburg can be described as being in constant flux. An understanding of crime in Johannesburg thereby begins with a history of how it became an uneven space. Murray (2008:1) characterizes the city's fluctuation with the following:

The fluid, chaotic quality of city life in Johannesburg after apartheid is reflected in the unresolved tension between the overall plan of urban space and its specific details, between the durability of the built environment and the transitory use of urban locations, and between the deliberate regulation of spatial practices and the uncontrolled anarchy of chance encounters in public places.

Some scholars suggest that racialized segregation and the spatial unevenness of the metropolitan landscape in Johannesburg originally occurred as a result of it being the site of the world's largest gold rush (Murray 2011, Katsaura 2015). The city was built upon an appetite for gold, which meant that little attention was given to where and how its citizens would live. While the gold mining industry made a major contribution to the country's national budget and provided enough foreign exchange for essential imports, Johannesburg did not have access to a river or mountain, and thus the city struggled to invent an enduring image for itself that would break with its chaotic historical origins (Thompson 2001, Murray 2008). At the same time, the white population of the country consolidated control over the state, strengthening its grip on the black population and ultimately eliminating the legal power of the British government

to intervene in South African affairs (Thompson 2001). The mining industries maintained a split between well-paid white employees and poorly paid black employees, just as they do between those in power and those on the margins (Thompson 2001). These issues of segregation were exacerbated with the official introduction of apartheid in 1948. Apartheid principles essentially ensured that segregation was exercised in all aspects of life in the city, but what was arguably more insidious was the internalization of these racist principles in citizens. Johannesburg still bears the effects of apartheid spatial order and segregation despite the fact that racially codified restrictions no longer legally apply (Thompson 2001). To this end, while Johannesburg attempts to rebuild its reputation following the end of apartheid, it has struggled to reconcile its unbecoming past with its future. These chaotic characteristics of the 'new Johannesburg' have had an effect on the staggeringly high rates of crime in the city.

Other legacies in Johannesburg have also contributed to the city's high crime rates. First, like all apartheid cities, black people's access to public spaces in Johannesburg was heavily regulated (Shaw and Shearing 1998, Palmary et al. 2003). These realities overlapped with dramatic disparities between areas of wealth and poverty, as well as divergences in the quality of services offered in black townships and white suburbs (Palmary et al. 2003). These marginalized areas of urban life have arguably continued past apartheid, and much of these experiences have resulted in violent struggles over rights to socioeconomic equality (Palmary et al. 2003). For example, there has been a strong trend of violent attacks on migrants by black South Africans, in which the attacks are considered justified because the migrants are perceived to be responsible for taking South Africans' jobs (Bearak and Dugger 2008, Paulay et al. 2003). In this way, it is argued that a "language of legitimacy" continues to regulate access to urban spaces and that systems of hierarchy from the apartheid era remain intact, even today (Paulay et al. 2003: 102). Violent

conflicts, including assault and murder, occur within and between marginalized communities just as they do between those in power and those on the margins. Further, a breakdown of “social capital” has led to increased levels of crime and also negatively impacted the city’s ability to fight it. The breakdown of social capital, in this sense, refers not only to poverty and unemployment deriving from social exclusion, but also the social valuation of a “culture of violence” where violence is a normative mechanism for the assertion of power (Palmary et al. 2003). The culture of violence also propagates discrimination and exclusion deriving from various forms of oppression, and encourages a degradation of urban environments and social bonds (Palmary et al. 2003). In these ways, Johannesburg has lacked the major mechanisms that could help to protect a society against crime.

Considering the urban landscape of Johannesburg during apartheid and the aforementioned implications of racial segregation, it is clear that the relationships between citizens and their geographical boundaries could have played a large role in the maintenance of high crime rates in the city. This legacy of structural violence in Johannesburg was arguably even further complicated by South Africa’s transition to democracy. During the years of apartheid, a plethora of petty offenses were criminalized through racially discriminatory laws, which ultimately enforced a rhetoric in which blackness became associated with criminality and criminal behaviour (Bremner 2004, Shaw 2002, Shaw and Shearing 1998, Tshwete 2000). During the 1980s, when the apartheid state faced its biggest challenges and oppositions, crime in black townships increased significantly through politically inspired violence and state repression, likely as a response to the racial discrimination (Bremner 2004, Cawthra 2003, Shaw and Shearing 1998). Increasing levels of crime peaked in the 1990s, the year in which political transition began, and then even more so over the next four years (Bremner 2004, Shaw 2002). The slow pace of change that then occurred in the post-apartheid period

– characterized by the maintenance of stagnant political relationships between ordinary South Africans and the new democratic state – meant that “few expectations of urban renewal, housing development, schooling improvement, job creation, or service delivery” were realized (Palmary et al. 2003: 104). These frustrated expectations of change further increased the existing level of social conflict in South African cities (Palmary et al. 2003, Shaw 2002, Cawthra 2003). In these ways, the transition to democracy fuelled the existing infrastructure of violence found in Johannesburg.

### **Role of CCTV Intervention**

Having considered the socio-historical context of general crime in Johannesburg, resulting in its reputation as the “crime capital” of South Africa (Palmary, Rauch, and Simpson 2003: 101), it is obvious why the Metropolitan Police Department would attempt to implement a strategy that would curb these high crime rates and change the City’s increasingly negative reputation. The installation of CCTV became this solution, and while it had previously been used in privatized spaces, the project’s induction into Johannesburg’s public sphere in the late 1990s was a new phenomenon (Minnar 2007). The Police Department website offers the following explanation on the project (2015):

A CCTV Surveillance Project operates in key areas where street crime is prevalent. Cameras are hidden in buildings overlooking strategic spots on the pavements of the CBD. [...] When an incident occurs the appropriate officials - emergency services or crime prevention - are dispatched to the location. [...] In an initial pilot project, 15 crime surveillance cameras were set up in the area surrounding the Carlton Centre. Even in such a limited pilot project, the cameras had a significant impact and, according to Riaan Parker of Business Against Crime, the company that designed and operates the system, crime in the area fell by 40 percent.

Apart from the project's goals and results, there are several items in this explanation worth considering within a broader context. First, it is imperative to question where the cameras are 'strategically placed,' and thereby whom they aim to protect. Shaw and Shearing (2003) emphasize the importance of the fact that during apartheid, South African police forces acted to maintain spatial boundaries, ensuring that black access to white spaces was restricted as much as possible. With respect to crime control, this established a "risk-based form of policing, not unlike zero tolerance policing, that operated to reduce the opportunities for crime in white areas by keeping would-be black offenders away from white victims" (Shaw and Shearing 2003: 3, Benit-Gbaffou 2008). In the same vein, police had little interest under apartheid in responding to crimes within black areas, except when black challenges to the apartheid state became more numerous in the 1980s (Shaw and Shearing 2003). Insofar as this racialized logic of policing has left a legacy that extends into the present day, it is likely that the presence of CCTV in Johannesburg's CBD is placed 'strategically' where these racially codified narratives are reinforced, with a focus on protecting white citizens and tourists from characteristically 'black offenders.' In addition to the issue of whom CCTV aims to protect, there is also the question of whether the project contributes to a decrease in crime or whether it simply improves response times. There is little literature available on these topics beyond that of the City's statement, as seen above, in which it is explained that even in a pilot project the city saw a 40 percent decrease in crime (City of Johannesburg 2015c). While CCTV indeed helps to streamline policing processes, it is difficult to ascertain whether crime is likely to fall simply as a result of citizens knowing that they are being watched. I would suggest that CCTV would likely have to be implemented alongside other crime prevention tactics in order to see a sustainable decrease.

### **Invisibility of Sexual Violence**

Another troubling aspect of CCTV is the fact that it has been implemented as a prevention and response tactic, without the support of other programs to combat crime. This move prioritizes certain crimes while others are pushed to the periphery. Sexual violence is one of these crimes that has been rendered invisible in Johannesburg, and yet it is of utmost importance because of the country's increasing reputation for a lack of safety. For instance, while South African crime levels have been consistently amongst the highest in the world, particular types of reported crime have increased exponentially since 1994, including rape (Cawthra 2003). In 1995, Human Rights Watch asserted that there were 35 rapes in South Africa for every one reported to the police, although there continues to be disagreement about the exact magnitude of the problem (Jewkes and Abrahams 2002). Compounding to this lack of reliable statistics is the fact that many women will only report to the police those incidents that fall within popular understandings of rape, such as rape at the hands of a stranger and rape that occurs by a man on a woman, and are often afraid that they will not be taken seriously (Jewkes and Abrahams 2002, Palmary et al. 2003). What may be the most common forms of sexual coercion, such as those occurring within marriages, relationships, or families, are those which go most unreported in South Africa to the police due to this fear and lack of knowledge (Jewkes and Abrahams 2002). Moreover, only approximately 25% of assaults happen on open ground (Palmary et al. 2003, Swart et al. 2000). That much of the sexual violence in Johannesburg happens where it is not immediately visible to police, contributes to why the state has not conceived sexual violence as a priority in regards to crime prevention. I would also argue that certain bodies, such as white middle-class citizens and tourists, are actually deemed more valuable, thus affecting which crimes are prioritized in the city. This is despite the fact that those white tourists could also be at risk for sexual violence. Thus, no matter the fact that this par-

ticular form of violence is increasing in Johannesburg, the police have thus far used CCTV to seemingly address only those crimes that occur most often to white citizens.

Sexual violence in Johannesburg is also a historical issue, much like the other crimes that were addressed at the beginning of this paper. However, sexual violence has not been written about in the same detail. Only recently have scholars begun to research the effects of sexual violence, and they too are limited by unreliable statistics. Among the studies that have been published are those by Peter Delius and Clive Glaser (2002), Rachel Jewkes and Naeema Abrahams (2002), and Deborah Posel (2005). Despite a lack of breadth in the literature, it can be ascertained from their findings that sexual violence is pervasive enough to warrant stronger crime prevention in this area in Johannesburg. While recognizing that sexual violence takes many forms, it is important to note how difficult it can be for women particularly to navigate daily life with the threat of sexual violence. Thus, I would suggest that sexual violence should be of importance to the Johannesburg Metropolitan Police and that CCTV would be insufficient to address it. The analysis and efforts must begin at the core of gender relations in Johannesburg, and expand to include the daily-lived realities of people living in the city.

Given the discussion in this paper, it seems that what inspires the existing literature on sexual violence is an increasing awareness of its prevalence in South Africa. However, the responsibility to discuss these issues has far too often fallen on individuals rather than the state. The recent Johannesburg City Safety Strategy Report (2015b) suggested that "priority crimes" are those that have the most significant impact on "business confidence and investment decision-making, and the tourism market," such as theft and corruption. The disconnect between the priorities given by the state and the reality of sexual violence in the city suggests that those bodies at higher risk of sexual violence are deemed less valuable by the government, especially in relation to crime prevention programs,

whereas those who are mainly involved in business and the tourism market – mostly men – are deemed more valuable. The few safety strategies in Johannesburg that allude to the environment of sexual violence suggest that women avoid certain public spaces at certain times, thereby implying that women are safest in their homes, when the opposite is often the case (Vetten and Dladla 2000). This rhetoric also focuses solely on women, ignoring male victims of sexual violence in the process, as well as transgendered individuals and those in homosexual relationships. As previously mentioned, it is possible that the invisibility of sexual violence is precisely *why* it has yet to become a priority. However, I do not believe that the state cannot recognize the increasing importance of this issue. In fact, they are complicit in the maintenance of sexual violence by emphasizing that women should not be in specific public spaces. These tropes simply reinforce that the responsibility for the assault is their own. Transcending these narratives may be the first step in enabling sexual violence to be viewed as a priority crime. It may be that police intervention is not the best way for dealing with sexual violence, but a change in the narrative is relevant to the issue and can be articulated at multiple levels, including by the police.

### **Conclusion**

Johannesburg's unbecoming past will continue to affect its future so long as the city's history is not taken into consideration when addressing its issue of crime. There is a large gap in the ability of the CCTV Surveillance Project in Johannesburg to address the city's crime, as its high rates of sexual assault are not easily visible, and crime is compounded by the prevailing racial order. The historical context in which Johannesburg's crime rates have flourished is foundational to a metropolitan identity that is characterized by a reputation of danger and fear, and is crucial in understanding the reasons why the CCTV Surveillance Project may not realize its full potential

as a strategy for combating and preventing crime. On the one hand, the project is valuable insofar as it helps to streamline policing processes for a city that has historically struggled in this area. On the other hand, it is critical to evaluate the ways in which CCTV is used to create a “climate of fear” in which certain bodies are targeted in ways that are reminiscent of colonial and apartheid-based narratives (Burger Allen 2002, Dursuweit 2002, Katsaura 2015). Moreover, the specific goals of the project should be made clear as well as its limitations. Ultimately, CCTV needs to be implemented alongside other crime prevention and response tactics that address particular crimes like sexual violence. This has also been a suggestion of the city’s recent Safety Strategy Report (2015). A larger understanding and restructuring of the roots of the ‘climate of violence’ from which pervasive fear originates and flourishes in Johannesburg should thereby accompany the CCTV Surveillance Project, in order for it to adequately address the core issues that it seeks to work on.

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