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Challenging the public realm: gated communities in history

Private and fortified communities are by no means new in urban history. Cities from ancient times through the Middle Ages often featured walls for protection from inter-group hostility. By the 19th century, though, with pacification and internal security contributing to the development of the modern nation state, the open city became a more characteristic form in Western nations (Mumford, 1961). Rulers and governments invested in urban infrastructure like parks, streets, and sidewalks, creating an improved public realm. While the public spaces and streets of Victorian era cities were in theory open, in practice they were often contested and dominated by the interests of particular classes (Domosh, 1998; Goheen, 2004; Lawrence, 1993). Even with open boundaries, cities can exclude or segregate people.

Although governments took increasing responsibility for planning and building roads and other urban infrastructure through the 19th and 20th centuries (Girouard, 1990; Hodge & Gordon, 2008), developers of some exclusive residential areas continued to use private streets. Indeed, the modern version of the fortified enclave appeared in the 19th century as residential retreats for the extremely affluent: Montretout in Saint-Cloud in Paris in 1832 and Llewellyn Park, New Jersey in 1854 are well-known early examples (Le Goix, 2006a). Private streets provided quiet refuge for the growing middle classes in cities like Paris (Figure 1), Toronto (Figure 2), and St Louis (Goheen, 1994; Newman, 1995; Webster & Le Goix, 2005).

Figure 1: Paris has many gated private streets from the 19th century.

As a model for town planning, the Garden City dominated town planning practice for much of the 20th century (Howard, 1902; S Ward, 1992). Public street patterns of curvilinear streets and culs-de-sac sought to minimize traffic in residential neighbourhoods, but generally remained open to visitors (Marshall, 2005; Southworth & Ben-Joseph, 2003). Most master planned private communities – places like Levittown NY, Columbia MD, and Irvine CA -- employed open streets and borders (Forsyth, 2005; Gans, 1967), creating a public presence through private enterprise. Early in the century of mass suburbanization, however, a small number of private and gated communities appeared. For instance, Le Goix (2006) notes that in the Los Angeles area developers built enclaves such as Rolling Hills in 1935, Bradbury in 1938, and Hidden Hills in 1950. Beginning in the late 1950s, some of these enclosed communities began incorporating as municipal units, creating fortified towns in some ways similar to the medieval settlements of Europe.

Figure 2: Private communities for industrial barons appeared in 19th century Toronto.

After several centuries of being relatively uncommon in Western cities, enclosed communities re-emerged as a form for new development in the late 20th century. The energy crisis of the 1970s put an end to an era of free-spending welfare state policies in many nations. By the 1980s governments of varying political stripes began trimming spending and reducing regulations as neoliberalism grew ascendant (Hackworth, 2007; Harvey, 2005). An increasing fear of crime contributed to a fear of the city (Marcuse, 1997, Wilson-Doenges, 2000) and a withdrawal from public space (Putnam, 2000). That fear and angst opened space for a resurgence of private and gated communities in several countries (Caldeira, 2000; Low, 2003).

McKenzie (1994) identified the rapid growth of private communities in the US through the 1980s. Blakely's and Snyder's (1997) pivotal research on American gated communities estimated the country had 20,000 gated communities housing 3 million residents. A few years later the 2000 US census recorded that 4 million households lived in access controlled (gated) neighbourhoods (Sanchez et al, 2005). The numbers living in

private communities is considerably higher, with the Community Associations Institute estimating almost 60 million residents by 2008 (CAI 2008).

While the trends were documented first in the US, subsequent research confirmed that gated and private communities occur in many parts of the world. Some of these new gated towns reach considerable size. Alphaville in São Paolo, Brazil, had 30,000 residents at the time of Caldeira's (2000) study. Nordelta in Buenos Aires, Argentina, is an even larger city planned for 80,000 (Janoschka & Borsdorf, 2006). The largest of the enclaves though, is in China, planned for 300,000 residents (Webster et al, 2006). In some relatively poor countries, gated communities offer a strategy for organizing private infrastructure and services in a situation where the state cannot provide them. In some circumstances of infill development, the enclaves facilitate co-location of classes in closer proximity with walls or fences separating them. Borsdorf et al (2007) suggest that in large metropolises in Latin America almost all new urbanization takes a gated form. In China, gated communities in some ways continue historic urban traditions and have become the systematic strategy for building new residential zones (Pow, 2007a, 2007b).

Are these enclaves new forms of intentional self-governing communities where consumers exercise democratic choice through collective consumption clubs (Nelson, 2005; Webster, 2002), or do they represent a new form of segregation and spatial inequality that threatens the survival of public space (Dear & Flusty, 1998; Kohn, 2004)? A review of gated communities quickly illustrates the diversity in forms and functions of the gates: enclaves reflect a range of socio-economic circumstances and cultural-historical conditions. The next sections of the paper discusses some of the reasons for and experience with gating first in states with an insecure context, then in states where security issues are less prominent. Enclosure manages the symptoms of insecurity but does nothing to address the underlying causes of fear and conflict often used to justify gating. In the contemporary city, gates render spatial and social inequality visible. The paper concludes with a discussion of the functions of gating and the challenges it creates for planning.

Gating in an Insecure Context

In some cases, authorities cannot guarantee the security of residential communities, leaving enclosure as a potential strategy to provide greater safety for residents. Depending on the circumstances, the state may take an active role in providing security through enclosure, or it may play a passive role and leave security to others. Enclosed or gated communities can result from both conditions.

History is replete with examples of state authorities that have used enclosure to provide community security. Rulers of ancient civilizations built walls of varying materials and dimensions (Morris, 1994). The walled towns of medieval Europe reflected the need for protection from attack, but also a desire for enhanced social control of movement and trade (Mumford, 1961). Colonial authorities throughout history have established fortified settlements to claim and hold territory in areas occupied by earlier inhabitants. Two

millennia ago, the Romans planted walled towns across Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East (Owens, 1991). In colonial North America the French and British enclosed early settlements like Quebec City in 1608, New Orleans in 1718, and Halifax in 1749. While colonial authorities saw their communities as outposts of civility, indigenous residents likely viewed the enclaves as emblems of oppression.

In the contemporary context states continue to use enclosure to provide security, although less commonly than in the past. For instance, enclosed military bases provide quarters for soldiers and their families. State-provided fortified neighbourhoods for civilians occurred in areas like Northern Ireland during "the troubles". In the US local authorities have sometimes gated public housing projects in an effort to manage crime problems like drug dealing and prostitution (Newman, 1995); the 2000 US census showed significant concentrations of poor renters in gated communities (Sanchez et al, 2005).

A context of conflict over land in contested territories can lead to a strategy of state enclosure of settlements in the contemporary period. For instance, the State of Israel contributes to fencing and policing community settlements over the "Green Line" (areas occupied by Israel after 1967, when the territories were gained in the Six-Day War). The enclosed settlements are varyingly described as an "innovative experiment to disperse population in Israel" (Carmon, 1994: 639), frontier gated communities (Rosen & Razin, forthcoming), or a strategy for "controlling the Arab minority through territorial containment" (Yiftachel, 1991: 329). Like an earlier generation of colonizing enclaves, the community settlements provide the context for new populations to inhabit landscapes with the power of the state behind them (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Walls, fences, and security guards feature prominently in residential landscapes in Israel.

Extreme power imbalances, economic inequality, and ethnic strife frequently contribute to crime or fear of violence, as may be the case in places like Trinidad (Mycoo, 2006), India (Falzon, 2004, Waldrop, 2004), Lebanon (Glasze, & Alkhayyal, 2002), and Egypt (Kuppinger, 2004). An insecure context may result from the failure or inability of the state to provide adequate security to manage these problems. Sometimes the state may prove too weak to intervene, or may be preoccupied with other responsibilities and lack the resources to ensure security in residential neighbourhoods. In other cases, the state

may not wish to intervene either because providing security for the communities at risk is not a high priority or because the state wishes to let market processes operate unimpeded. Such circumstances of continuing insecurity generate opportunities for either market interests or social groups to begin the process of fortification to re-establish security, social control, and segregation.

Even in history we find examples of corporate interests using enclosed compounds as a residential strategy. For instance, in establishing the fur trade in the Canadian west, the Hudson's Bay Company built fortified settlements to house its workers and their families. More recently, in countries with significant security problems residential development companies have seen gated communities as an important strategy for appealing to affluent classes. In places like Brazil and Argentina, these communities can be quite large and fully equipped with community services, retail outlets, and armed security forces (Caldeira, 2000; Carvalho et al, 1997; Roitman, 2006). Such enclaves reinforce extreme inequality and class segregation.

When neither the state nor the market offers security to communities that feel vulnerable, then social groups may take matters in their own hands and erect barriers or walls. Examples of local actors organizing to enhance their own security by enclosure occur in many places. For instance, in early modern Israel kibbutz settlements erected fences and other security measures to protect settlers. In contemporary middle and upper class neighbourhoods in Mexico City and in South Africa residents have illegally barricaded public streets to try to manage crime (Giglia, 2004; Landman, 2000, 2003; Low, 2006)

In the context of the state's inability or unwillingness to guarantee security, perhaps residents' decision to turn to gated communities makes some sense as a spatial strategy, even if it is problematic from a social justice perspective. It seems harder to understand why gated communities appear in situations where the state has successfully established conditions of relative stability and security.

Gating in a Relatively Secure Context

What explains the proliferation of new gated communities in relatively peaceful and safe Western nation states in the last two-and-a-half decades? The principal explanatory paradigm in this context is the ascendance of neoliberalism, a political and economic philosophy that advocates entrepreneurial freedom and private property rights. In the late 1970s and early 1980s states of many political stripes began to liberalize monetary policy, deregulate markets, and promote individual rights and liberties (Harvey, 2005). As neoliberal policies led to reassessment of the role of the state, space opened for private interests and private sector solutions to undermine the importance of public space and open communities. Under neoliberal conditions, the state may passively or actively enable the development of enclaves as a strategy for reducing public costs, promoting status and identity, and securing social control.

Although public authorities like planners often dislike gated communities, the state may passively enable the development of enclaves by reducing expenditures on the public realm or rolling back regulations that keep communities open and accessible. Tax reduction measures, like Proposition 13 in California in the late 1970s, stripped local governments of revenues to provide and maintain urban infrastructure, leaving them particularly vulnerable to proposals for private services such as roads (Blakely & Snyder, 1997; Davis, 1990; Le Goix, 2006a; McKenzie, 1994). As governments eager to cut expenditures talked about improving choices for residents and responding to market forces, private and gated communities began appearing in post-industrial democracies like Canada, UK, France, US, Australia, and New Zealand (Grant, 2005; Grant et al, 2004; Hillier & McManus ,1994; Rofe, 2006). New gated communities have also appeared in landscapes with a history of residential enclaves and fortified settlements, like Israel (Rosen & Razin, forthcoming).

Most enclosed communities in the contemporary context are created by developers as niche strategies for targeted consumers (Figure 4). Senior citizens and affluent households are common target markets, but some developers build enclaves for those of more modest means. Gated communities can be quite small (with only a handful of homes on a cul-de-sac), or may accommodate tens of thousands of residents with full municipal services.

Figure 4. In parts of Arizona, most of the new developments are gated.

In some cases social groups that may be especially concerned about social control and separation from outsiders use enclosure to protect cultural identity and prevent unwanted mixing. The nature of these enclosures varies. In some cases the walls are simple, gates left open, or barricades incomplete. For instance, Rosen & Razin (forthcoming) note that extensive signage in ultra-Orthodox neighbourhoods in Jerusalem warn outsiders about dressing and behaving in particular ways. In rural contexts in parts of the US, fundamentalist religious communities erect extensive fencing around their territories to prevent intrusions from outsiders.

Despite conditions of relative stability and security, some states nonetheless actively enable or encourage the private sector and social groups to enclose communities. States

have different reasons for facilitating gated communities: for instance, some want to manage population movement; some want to download the costs of providing urban infrastructure. Pow (2007a, 2007b) argues that in China the post-socialist state promotes development in closed residential compounds to facilitate service delivery and to control the movements of rural migrants. In Israel the state may provide army security and fencing even in relatively secure locations to manage the movement of Arabs (Falah, 1996; Rosen & Razin, forthcoming; Yiftachel & Yacobi, 2003). In cities like North Las Vegas in the US, local authorities make it impossible for developers to build anything other than private communities by imposing landscaping requirements that necessitate a homeowners association (McKenzie, 2006). In a context where residents pay for the upkeep of local streets, the motivation to gate roads to limit access is strong.

Reasons for Gating; Reasons to Resist Gating

For those with the means to purchase or rent homes within enclosed communities, gated developments have significant appeal (Figure 5). While in some contexts enhancing security is clearly the prime reason that gated communities thrive, in other places other factors drive enclosure. Although the types of gated communities vary widely (Grant & Mittelsteadt, 2004) the functions of the gates for residents of the enclaves can be summarized in *Five S's*.

- *Security and safety* – The residents of enclaves believe that enclosure enhances safety and security. Such issues are prime concerns for certain populations, such as senior citizens.
- *Surveillance and social control* – The residents of gated communities seek civil behaviour and social homogeneity. Guards, security cameras, and residents monitor behaviour and enforce rules.
- *Separation and privacy* – Enclosure provides a way for residents to manage their interactions with others, and to determine the level of social contact they want with outsiders.
- *Status and identity* – In many regions enclosure affects property values and reinforces the social prestige of inhabitants. Those inside the enclosure may share a strong group identity.
- *Services and amenities* –Gates allow residents to manage access to shared "club" goods (Webster, 2002). Those who pay for the amenities can prevent outsiders from using the facilities.

States and their agents tolerate or even encourage enclosure of residential developments. Political philosophies that support the resurgence of individualism and notions of local provision of services and infrastructure contribute to a context within which privatized landscapes proliferate. In that scenario, those who can afford amenities get them, while those of lesser means are spatially and socially isolated outside the enclaves.

The consequences associated with the proliferation of gated communities are troubling to those concerned about social justice. Enclaves threaten decades of progress towards

greater social integration and accommodation of diversity. They reinforce ethnic and economic segregation. They enhance the commodification of privacy and individualism. They institutionalize surveillance and police conformity. Does the re-emergence of the gated community signal an end to the vision of an open, inclusive, and equitable community? Areas of extensive enclave development clearly affect urban connectivity and frustrate efforts to improve transit services or alternative transportation networks to meet the needs of disadvantaged groups in the community (Handy et al., 2003; Grant & Curran, 2007). Gated projects have been linked to increased social segregation by race and class at local scale in Los Angeles (Le Goix, 2006b), and also in many developing nation contexts. Enclaves are a symptom of extreme inequality.

Figure 5. Gated enclaves have appeared in the UK as well.

Has planning been complicit in the ascendance of the enclave? The dominant theory in contemporary planning discourse, new urbanism and smart growth, argue for open, integrated, and accessible residential areas and explicitly criticize gated developments (Duany et al, 2000). Yet planning practice seems able to do little to reduce the demand for gated communities. The agendas of planners' professional and academic conferences have seldom addressed enclaves head on; while professional associations have assiduously promoted smart growth they have said little about gated communities. Planners seem to accept privatization as either a fact of life or as an impossible fight (Grant, 2005b). Marcuse (2004) suggests that gated communities should be prohibited, but who would prohibit them? Local planners lack the authority and political support to resist the demand for enclave living. Thus planning advocates theories of a vital, open, and integrated public realm while practitioners find themselves signing off on private, gated communities for particular social groups.

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