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Policing Johannesburg wealthy neighborhoods: the uncertain 'partnerships' between police, communities and private security companies

Claire Bénit-Gbaffou

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Abstract:
The paper examines the challenges raised by "partnerships" between state and non-state security stakeholders, relying on two security experiments developed in Johannesburg wealthy neighborhoods. It raises the question of their monitoring by the police – understood as the police capacity to coordinate the multiple, non-state policing initiatives that otherwise remain fragmented "security networks". The community initiatives seem easier to integrate within the local police strategies – since the private security sector has got its own, market-driven logic. However, the formalisation of partnerships between police and communities have generally failed, due to their technical fragility (flexibility of community involvement, personalization of relationships leading to possible corruption and conflict) and their political difficulties (if the private sector can easily target the high income area, it is considered less legitimate for police to set up "elitist policing" thanks to the involvement of wealthy communities). Finally, abandoning these forms of partnerships might encourage a further privatization of the production of security – using more classical, easier-to-set "contracts" with the private sector that do not seem to lead to a real "partnership" with, nor a monitoring by, the police.

Presentation of author:
Dr. Claire Bénit-Gbaffou is a Senior lecturer in Geography at the University of Aix-Marseille, France. She is a member of the UMR TELEMME, and associate researcher in the Laboratoire Gecko (University of Paris X-Nanterre). She is currently working as a senior research specialist in the Urban Unit of the Human Science Research Council (HSRC) of South Africa. She is co-editing, with Dr. Elisabeth Peyroux and Dr. Seyi Fabiyi, a book on the "Privatisation of security in African cities: urban dynamics and new forms of governance". Her research interests focus on local government, urban fragmentation and community participation in metropolitan areas, such as Johannesburg and Los Angeles.

Dr. Claire Bénit-Gbaffou
HSRC, URED
134 Pretorius Street,
0001 Pretoria, South Africa
Tel: +27.(0)12.302.27.19
Fax: +27.(0)12.302.27.01
cbenit@hsrc.ac.za
clairebenit@hotmail.com

In the context of the demise of the apartheid regime in South Africa, which witnessed both the spread of crime into areas that were previously protected through the apartheid containment strategy, and the necessary restructuring of the police service[1], the South African State massively appealed to non-State actors to help the police fighting crime, describing civil society (defined as both business and community organisations, private security companies and police reservists) as important "partners" to the State in the fight against crime[2].

These public partnerships with residents associations on the one hand, with the private sector on the other, are in line with worldwide trends to promote security governance, and reform the police in order to make it more accountable to the residents and more efficient in its crime prevention strategy[3]. However, behind the term "partnership" lays a plurality of agreements: roles, functions and responsibilities regarding crime prevention are unevenly shared, depending on the local contexts and the stakeholders involved.

Some authors rather speak of "security networks" to describe the pluralisation of policing agents at the local level[4]. The notion of network is looser than that of partnership. Newburn defines it as an "increasingly complex and diffenciated patchwork of security providers"; he stresses the importance, "when thinking of the idea of a 'network of security', not to overemphasize the degree of integration". The term of network might be closer than that of 'partnership' to the reality experimented on the ground – lack of real coordination, prevalence of *ad hoc* and flexible agreements, etc. On the contrary, partnership implies an agreement between several parts, legally or morally binding, and in the case of public-private partnerships indicates some control implemented by the public authority. However, in the security field, little empirical evidence or theoretical analysis have been devoted to the monitoring or regulating capacity of the police over non-state security initiatives; and this is what this paper wishes to address, since we follow Shaw[5] in arguing that the central issue in security governance is not so much how to eradicate "these security instruments that compete with the state", but how to manage them.

There are of course forms of partnership that involve a minimal public control, such as sub-contracting or outsourcing police's functions and duties[6] - where control is reduced to the legal regulation of non-state activity (with little resources to actually check its application[7]), and to a possible (but difficult) assessment of the outcomes of such activity. In this paper we looked for a little bit more than that: we considered joint security operations where the police can try and make use of the supplementary technical, financial and staff resources offered by the non-state actors. In this sense, we assume[8] that the state is more than just "one (albeit important) player in a network of governing agencies"[9], and, especially in South Africa where it has got some administrative capacity as well as a strong political legitimacy, it ought to play a monitoring role over non-state security initiatives. Therefore, even if the boundaries between public and private policing stakeholders, practices and strategies are

[1] Leggett 2005.
[2] White Paper on Safety and Security, 1998.
[3] Shearing and Stenning 1983.
[4] Newburn 2001, Johnston 2001.
[5] Shaw 2000.
[6] Schönteich et al 2004.
[7] Berg 2003.
[8] In line with Loader and Walker 2001.
[9] Johnston 2001.

increasingly blurred[10], we'll insist, on the contrary, on the remaining, major distinction between the two types of actors – that has to do with the state's monopoly on the legitimate use of physical force.

The paper will draw on two case studies[11]: Parkview and Atholl, two middle- to upper-class areas located in the northern suburbs of Johannesburg, where the residents have chosen not to erect gates and barriers to protect themselves[12], but have preferred to rely on community policing as formally encouraged by the State. In both cases, they have created non-profit, "community" security companies, a kind of "third way" between full reliance on public policing and the hiring of a private security company. These experiments have been –or are being currently- discarded by the police, after having operated in informal ways for several years. They are highlighting, by both their successes and their failures, not only the technical complexities but also the political challenges lying in the construction of security partnerships between state and non-state actors. The first part of the paper will track down the specificity of this "third way", and the blurred line distinguishing community and business security initiatives; the second part will discuss the options available for the police to monitor non-state security initiatives.

How different are community security initiatives from private security companies?

Residents' groups in Atholl and Parkview, two suburban areas in northern Johannesburg, have decided to set up their own "community" security company, deemed not for profit and dedicated to the neighbourhood. Many residents had indeed claimed their dissatisfaction with private security companies, judged not "dedicated" enough to the area and becoming complacent after a while. The development of Community Policing Forums[13] (CPFs) and the public encouragement for community policing constituted a favourable context, the police often enhancing locally what was seen as a supplementary manpower more akin than the private sector to work with the police.

In Atholl, a high-income suburb not far from Alexandra township, a residents' association launched what they call Atholl Security Project. Residents contribute on a voluntary basis about R400[14] a month to the project, which pays for the seven private security guards (3 shifts) permanently standing at the entrances of the suburb, and also for a few agents employed by Atholl Project, repairing pavement and lighting, trimming the trees, collecting garbage etc.

[10] Baker 2002, Carrier 1999.

[11] Field research was conducted in 2004 and 2005, as part of the programme on « Privatisation of Security in African Cities : urban dynamics and new forms of governance », funded by the French Institute of South Africa.

[12] We have elaborated elsewhere on the road closure issue in Johannesburg (Bénit 2004; Bénit-Gbaffou forthcoming). See also Peyroux 2005.

[13] Statutory bodies set up by the police in each police precinct, in order to develop links with the residents.

[14] About 50 euros in January 2006.

Map1 - Securing Atholl without closing off the suburb

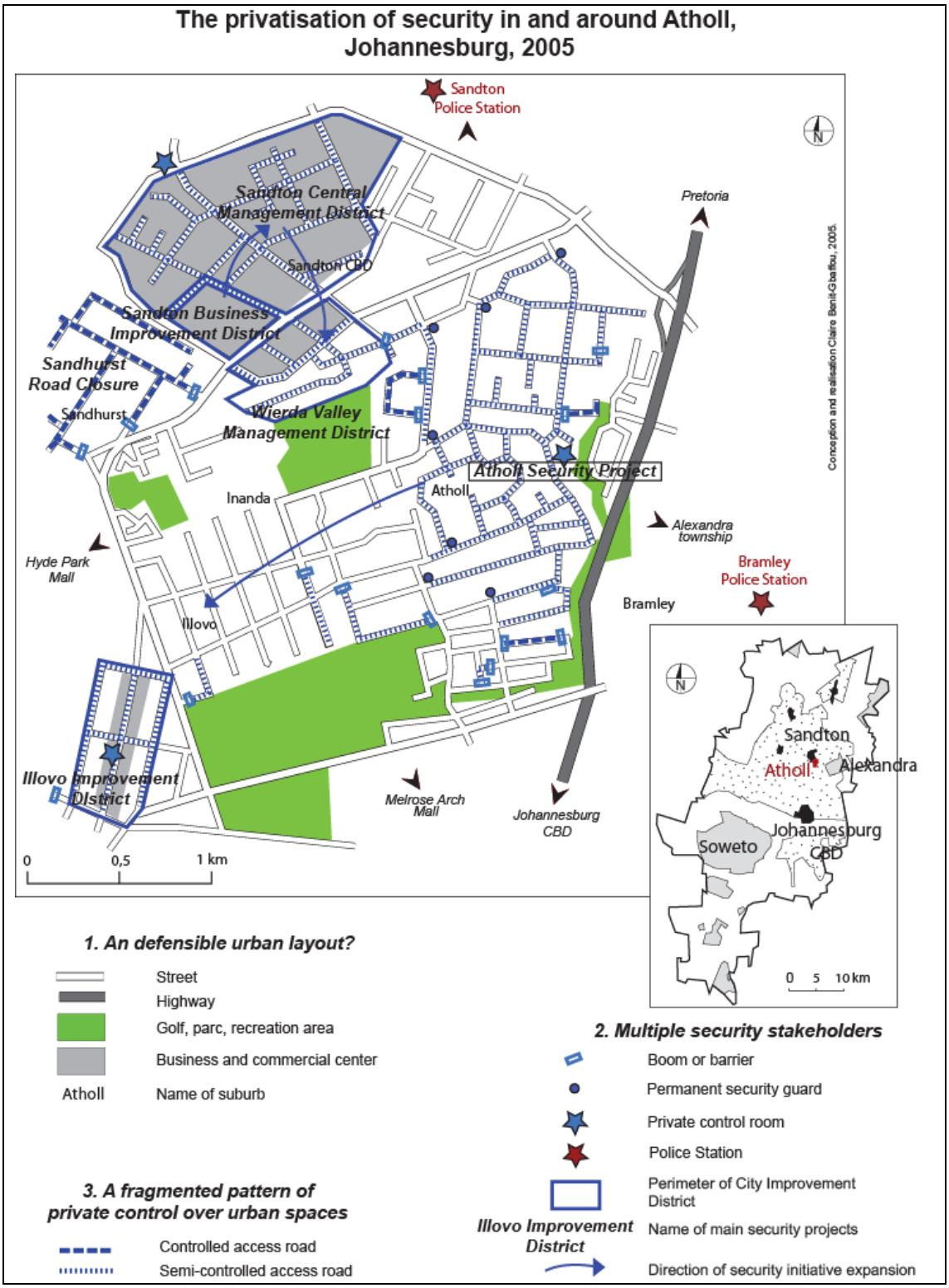
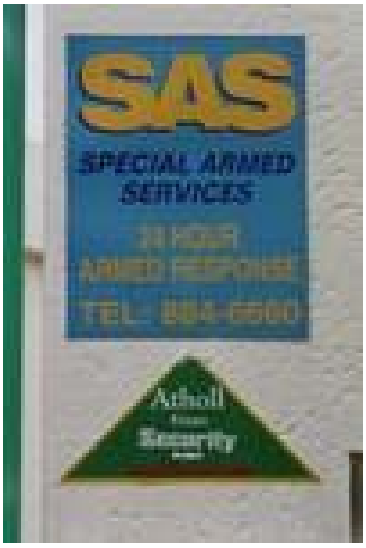


Photo 1- Different layers of security companies – one can never be too careful



Atholl, 2006, © Claire Bénit-Gbaffou. The Atholl logo (green triangle) is used more as a means of social pressure on those who are not "contributors", than as a crime deterrent for outsiders. It does not prevent the "contributors" to keep contracting with their former private security company. The total household expense for security can reach R1.000 (150 euros) a month.

Photo 2- Guard hut at each entrance of Atholl suburb



Atholl, 2004, © Claire Bénit. The 7 suburb entrances are guarded by security agents. The suburb is not closed off, but it is quite strictly controlled, each « stranger » to the suburb being watched, sometimes registered and followed. Whilst the overall cost is higher, the difference with enclosed neighbourhoods in terms of freedom of movement is here becoming subtle!

In Parkview (a police precinct including several middle-income to wealthy suburbs), unlike in Atholl the community security project was initiated and monitored by the Community Policing Forum (CPF). Parkview police have indeed largely supported the initiative, enhancing what they considered a real partnership with the "community", under the name *CPF on the Beat*. *CPF on the Beat* is a non-profit organisation set up by the Community Policing Forum in order to employ reservists (security guards, after it has been declared illegal to pay reservists –supposed to be mere "volunteers" helping the police) to patrol the area. The police would train and monitor the guards, and they would be in control of its operational use; whilst the community was in charge of the finance (collection of the money[15] and payment of the guards) through *CPF on the Beat*. The creation of the *CPF on the Beat* was rendered necessary because the Community Policing Forum itself, being a police statutory body, could not legally directly raise funds to employ security agents…

Both projects have been tempted over time to expand beyond the neighbourhood's boundaries – their success in terms of crime reduction being an incentive for growth (**figure 1, map 1**).

Competition between security companies to access a local market is fierce, especially in wealthier suburbs where a demand for expensive security policies is likely to develop. In Atholl for instance, the ward councillor had to intervene to stop a physical battle between agents of competing private security companies: one of them

[15] From R100 to R200 depending on the nature of the contributor (resident, small or big business): 12 to 25 euros.

was blocking the roads to prevent the others to enter the suburb, even throwing stones against the houses of people contracting with its competitors!

In such a competitive context, attempts to create integrated security networks, or real partnerships not only with the police but amongst different private security companies, are doomed. Bramley police (under which Atholl is falling) for instance proposed to set up a room within the police station to be used jointly by a police officer and a security agent (everyday from a different company) – which meant each private security agent would have had to work for the whole area (and not only for its company's customers). The initiative failed spectacularly.

In this context also, "community security companies" (set up as non-profit organisations) are very clearly identified by private security companies as competitors, and even "unfair competition" since the community security companies obviously do not comply with the private security regulations – and have pretensions to a local monopoly. It was one of the reasons why the Parkview initiative was eventually declared illegal by the Provincial commissioner, lobbied by a big private security company[16].

Figure 1- Portraits of community leaders – and security businessmen

The operational manager of the Atholl Security Project is a former employee of a security company. He was the local representative for the security company in Atholl, and got to know the customers. He then decided to do his security project on his own, sidelining the security company, and approached the chair of the residents association who was seduced by his project.

In Parkview, the manager of CPF on the Beat owns two businesses in Parkview, and he started uniting businesses to join a common security scheme, before being given the opportunity (by the CPF and the police) to create *CPF on the Beat*: a statutory non-profit organisation, collecting funds from voluntary donations (for which the acronym CPF is a good marketing device). The manager also was nominated deputy-chair of the CPF, but due to increasing conflicts with the other members of the CPF (accusing him of hiding *CPF on the Beat*'s benefits, supposedly to be transferred to the CPF account), he had to resign.

The competition is even more direct in Atholl, where the private security company originally hired by Atholl Security Project to guard the entrances of the suburb is progressively being ejected from the area, Atholl Security Project attempting to replace the private company's staff with its own contract workers. The manager of the Project indeed argues that it would allow the residents for a better crime prevention strategy, avoiding "outsourcing" and the unnecessary spreading of information to "outsiders". For the private security company, however, the progressive replacement of its agent by people employed by the Atholl Security Project is only a business strategy. Dumping the prices on the pretext of being a non-profit project, failing to pay regularly the private company it hired for the 7 permanent security posts, the chairman of the residents association is accused to try and push the security company out of the area[17]. The security company is currently busy

[16] The other reasons being: a community initiative becoming a business; the growing visibility of the initiative, becoming a model (with other suburbs asking for its extension to their area); the political accusation of representing "elitist policing"; a personal conflict between the chair of the CPF and the manager of *CPF on the Beat*.

[17] The Atholl Project proposes to patrol the street at night for R250 per household (R400 for the current private security company). Its failure to pay the security company led the latter (running at R30.000 a

denouncing to the police authorities these illegal (deemed "criminal") practices – not only business-wise, but also by using employees as street patrollers, who are not legally registered as security agents.

The distinction between community- and business-driven security projects is obviously extremely blurred. In such wealthy neighbourhoods, the households' contributions are potentially high and security issues are a major political concern, giving local leaders much scope for political advancement as well as personal enrichment[18]. Non-profit, "community" security companies seldom remain such, since temptations are numerous to transform into a thriving business and to make huge profits.

"Community" security companies are located in a specific niche of the private security market, promoting their small-scale, flexibility and accountability to the residents and to the police. But it is also a niche developed by some small private security companies, operating in a few suburbs only, who compete with the major ones by underlining their flexibility, their responsiveness to local demands, their closeness to the "community"[19]. The term "community" is indeed a very powerful marketing instrument, with or without the police support[20]. In Parkview, the confusion on the name *CPF on the Beat* allowed the organisation to raise funds in the name of the Community Policing Forum (CPF) – and there was a fierce legal battle led by the CPF and the police (after the project had been discarded) in order to forbid the use of such a misleading name.

Photo 3- CPF on the Beat: The police and the community support as a marketing device



Parkview, 2004, © Claire Bénit. CPF on the Beat is displaying these pamphlets now against the will of the community and the police, who have discarded the initiative (that they originally supported, as stated) as a profit-making operation, and voluntarily playing on the confusion with the CPF.

loss per month for its guarding operations) to cross-subsidise it by using the profit made by its armed response unit (about 300 customers in the area).

[18] As was stated by Didier and Morange (2005) in the case of Cape Town.

[19] The main difference with "community" security companies being the nature of the link with public authorities (the police in particular). This is the main point developed infra.

[20] See Angot 2006.

Moreover, in the name of the "community", security projects are able to put an increased social pressure over the residents who do not contribute financially, for instance in Atholl through the creation of a database pinpointing the residents not contributing.

However, community security projects are also being criticised by some residents for their lack of efficiency, in spite of their supposed local commitment. Small is not always beautiful, as smaller security companies (being community or business) lack the "back-up" system – an efficient radio system, a good training, backing cars, etc., allowing for quick and efficient response. This criticism is extended by residents to the police service itself, whose lack of resources is understood as the root of their inefficiency.

Figure 2 – The "community", a marketing device?

NON-contributors. We are currently trying to appeal to all residents of Atholl to assist us in some way, and we acknowledge those who really cannot afford the extra burden […]. The map of our suburb has really assisted us in the following up of residents, and one family has also really contributed in assisting us with the computerization of Atholl map and database! This is near completion, and we will be able to detail residents and all contributors, as well as those regrettably still "unknown" to the project.

Atholl newsletter, November 2003

How can police monitor non-State security initiatives?

However, non-state security stakeholders wishing to help the police[21] in addressing its lack of resource or personnel shortage encounter important technical as well as structural difficulties. We are not even mentioning here the political issue[22]: the overall equity question raised by the creation of an "elitist" police – obvious in these types of initiatives in the wealthy areas (where residents are able to pay for a better service), but also contained in a way in the very principle of "community policing", a factor of inequality since it is drawing on whichever resources are locally available.

The direct, personal contacts between police officers and residents or security companies, especially when involving money, are likely to slip into basic corruption practices. The weberian notion of an anonymous and therefore efficient and just bureaucracy is still entrenched in the very centralised South African Police Service, unlike in many other African countries[23]. However trends for decentralization, an increasing accountability to the residents at the station level and the enhancement of local partnerships, have certainly created expectations difficult to fulfill[24], as well as opened a scope for the personalization of relationships with the police[25].

In a system of locally unequal policing resources[26], what were the options for the residents of wealthy areas willing to help the police with what they have to offer: their money, while trying to avoid setting up mechanisms for corruption? Money

[21] As stated by several residents, they would better 'help the police' than 'make the security companies millionaires'…
[22] This point is developed in Bénit, 2005.
[23] Olivier de Sardan 2004.
[24] See Steinberg 2005, showing the contradiction between white rural communities' expectations, developed through a participation process (that the police and/or the residents target stock theft) and the national priorities leading to focus the local police resources on personal assaults, dominant in the townships.
[25] Hornberger 2004.
[26] The legitimacy of which is not discussed in detail here (see note 20).

handling, or hiring of supplementary policing personnel, needed to be mediated, either through a change of scale within the police (national police), or through an intermediary non-state body, providing in both case a form of control by creating a distance between contributors and beneficiaries.

The first solution – involving for instance donations to the national police budget that will eventually be allocated to the *ad hoc* police station- has not been adopted very long in Parkview nor in Atholl, because of the high level of social and spatial inequalities in South Africa and the post-apartheid importance of the principle of redistribution of public resources. In this context, donations to the national budget coming from a wealthy neighborhood are to be redistributed to deprived areas[27]. There are some informal agreements between donating communities and the police hierarchy (at the metropolitan and provincial level) to allocate the donated funds to the area it originated from – so as not to discourage donations; however these agreements remain informal and their formalization would be politically difficult.

The second solution was attempted in Parkview, through the creation of *CPF on the Beat*- a non profit organization that could collect funds, unlike the Community Policing Forum, a police statutory body. However the financial monitoring of this mediating agency by the Community Policing Forum failed[28], as *CPF on the Beat* acted less and less as a "community" body, more and more like a business.

An alternative and more common mediating agent would be …a private security company hired by the residents, and that would be expected by its collective customer (the "community") to work with the police. Establishing partnerships between the police and private security companies is indeed easier when there is one dominant, if not monopolistic, security company (be it private or community) in an area. Berg[29], in her case study of Cape Town, showed that the most efficient public-private security partnerships emerged in the City Improvement Districts[30], where a single security company is usually in charge with patrolling the delimited area. The same could be said about enclosures (restriction of access to public streets in a suburb), or in the security villages (private and walled neighbourhoods) – manned and patrolled as well by a dominant security company.



Photo 4 - "you enter a zone patrolled by Stallion"

Cyrilldene, 2003, © Claire Bénit. Residents have gathered to hire a single security company to patrol their neighbourhood, in order to avoid security network fragmentation. Such initiatives are however difficult to set up, due to residential mobility, ongoing contracts with rival security companies (the cost of changing security provider can be high), and unequal household financial capacity in the neighbourhood.

[27] Legislation allows police authorities to redistribute donations if they wish to do so.

[28] The manager of *CPF on the Beat* refused to submit its financial accounts to the Community Policing Forum (CPF), as had been agreed, but very informally, between him and the CPF chair when they were still friends.

[29] Berg 2004b.

[30] A City Improvement District is a perimeter within which property owners and businesses agree to pay a supplementary levy that will be used within the perimeter to enhance urban services, in particular security and cleanliness. The board of owners will usually hire a managing agency, which will employ a team of cleaners and security agents servicing the area. See also Didier and Morange, Peyroux in this issue.

However, these partnerships remain very fragile and probably quite limited. The marketing strategy of private security companies necessarily puts forward a competitive agenda – and their crime priorities and logic of action significantly differ from the police's[31].

Such a competition did not exist in Parkview residential area, where a strong relationship existed between the police and the 'community' security company through an empowered Community Policing Forum, whose representatives were significantly attending police management meetings, and were not pushed by any marketing concerns to take over the monitoring of the supplementary security force they were paying for. These difficulties are highlighted *a contrario* by the enthusiasm Parkview police expressed when talking about the community security initiative:

> "They [*CPF on the Beat*] had the support of the police: they had the same radio channel, a direct link with the police**. It was in a way the police's own private company. I could dictate them where to go**: 'there is crime in that street, deploy ten guys over there…' **It is the way we should actually work with private companies!** But I can't just say to ADT [a big private security company]: 'go there, there is crime'!" (Parkview police officer)

Conclusion

The difficulty in setting up 'real' partnerships lies in the complexity of the public monitoring of supplementary funds or personnel devoted to street policing. While donations to the police are acceptable, the direct payment of regular sums into police operational budgets by business or community stakeholders is very problematic, leading to a loss of independence and possible corruption of the police service. If mediating organisations can deal with the supplementary funds (be it community non-profit or business organisations), the question of monitoring the supplementary security personnel remains. The community initiatives seem easier to integrate within the local police strategies – since the private security sector has got its own, market-driven logic. However the formalisation of partnerships between police and communities have generally failed, due to their technical fragility (flexibility of community involvement, personalization of relationships leading to possible corruption and conflict, blurred boundaries between community and personal – financial and political- interests) as well as their political difficulties (if the private sector can easily target the high income area, it is considered less legitimate for police to set up "elitist policing" thanks to the involvement of wealthy communities).

Very aware of these complexities, the South African government is busy refining its monitoring of non-State security initiatives, by drafting new legislation on private security companies[32] as well as on Community Policing Forums (the 1995 legislation being considered to broad, having led to too big a variety of community security initiatives). However, the latter (in its Provincial version) seems to forbid – as a likely consequence of the Parkview experiment- the Community Policing Forums to have a close link with, or to set up and monitor any non-profit association. Initiatives like Atholl security project, much less genuine in terms of community involvement and not monitored by any public authority, are given preference and therefore are likely to develop, as well as communities' collective contracts with private security companies – also leaving the police aside. It is as if the complexity of a formal agreement with the police was too dangerous, possibly associating a public authority with dubious (business and political) practices, which are tolerated as long as no

[31] Shearing and Stenning 1983 ; Irish 1999.
[32] Berg 2003, Minaar 1999.

public authority puts its name on it: making money out of security, financing an "elite" police service, are accepted as long as they remain non-State initiatives, endorsed by non-State agents. Would it mean the abandonment of any attempt to monitor security networks – leaving vast areas to be policed by the private sector, giving up too complex partnerships with communities?

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