Crime and Violence in Informal Settlements: Unsafe Neighbourhoods

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Abstract: This Paper Is Dedicated To The Completion Of A Visual Urban Report On Safety In Informal Settlements. This Research Explores The History Of Apartheid In South Africa And Investigates How Urban Development Processes Within Informal Settlements Contribute To The Development Of Unsafe Neighbourhoods. Cape Town And The Largest Of These Slums, Khayelitsha, Were Selected As Macro And Micro Cases. Also The Barrio Ciudad Project In Honduras Was Analysed In This Study As A Best Practice Case Study. This Provides Insight Into How Design And Non-Design Measures Can Be Used To Address Insecurity In Informal Settlements.

1. Introduction

Currently, around one in seven of the world's population (one billion people) live in informal settlements, also known as slums, and the number is expected to double by 2030 [1]. At the same time, the quick progress of developing countries in the Global South has led to dramatic changes in the urban landscape. Bangkok, Delhi and Cape Town are fast developing metropolises in the world, each with a common difficulty; they lack dedicated informal settlements and the existing informal settlements do not have rudimentary services or open spaces. The lack of infrastructure exacerbates the inequality between informal and formal settlements. Inequalities between informal and formal settlements are accentuated by the lack of infrastructure. More importantly, the inequality present in these urban environments (and others like them) leads to poverty and exclusion. As a result, slums are often filled with crime and violence, negatively impacting the protection of human rights, as well as the quality of life of residents.

Although in recent years, ever more urban designers pay attention to slums, the design principles of formal cities are not applicable to solve the problems accompanying informal settlements. Therefore, designers should identify new approaches to solve issues in slums. This report evaluates Khayelitsha, Cape Town to illustrate the safety challenges in slums arising from rapid urban development. This study relates an international 'best practise' in Honduras to synthesise potential interventions which might alleviate issues with slums in Cape Town.

2. Cape Town: an Overview

An estimated 193,000 families spread across 204 informal settlements reside within Cape Town [2]. The city (and country) experienced nearly 50 years of apartheid, creating an unequal society separated ethnically, physically, materially, and spiritually. Nearly three decades after the end of apartheid, inequality remains readily visible, while rapid urban sprawl and Neoliberal processes continue to shape, and change the city.

2.1 The Colonial Times: Apartheid

One of the main reasons for the mass gathering of informal tribes in unregulated settlements and dwellings around South African cities today is apartheid. Government-run apartheid of whites and blacks has led to racial inequality and a widening gap between rich and poor. In detail, the South African government achieved its policy of apartheid in two key ways. The first way is to move people of colour out of certain areas. The Group Areas Act ensures that wealth, opportunities and infrastructure are concentrated in areas where white people congregate. Other species were placed

on land that was not available around the city. A famous example is District Six. Before District Six was defined as a white-community, it was ethnically diverse, however, the government ordered the exclusion of coloured people from the area as part of apartheid in 1964 [3]. The construction of landmark buildings is another policy adopted by the government to enforce the segregation policy to order to consolidate the validity of the policy. The railway station in the centre of Cape Town is a typical example. Different nationalities have their dedicated access to the station and this architectural design was mainly approved by the government of the time [4].

2.2 The End of the Apartheid Era: Suburbanisation

The influx of people into Cape Town after desegregation in search of better living and work, coupled with the government's inability to reduce the backlog of housing demand, led to the rapid growth of informal settlements around the city, leading to a fundamental breakdown in urban planning and design. The inhabitants built their houses from cheap materials, with shacks and dwellings built in close proximity to each other in rows. Necessities are hard to come by in these areas, as urban infrastructure is completely non-existent, violence and crime are increasingly prevalent, houses themselves are prone to flooding and sanitary conditions are poor.

2.3 Neoliberal Developments: Urban Improvement

Africa's big cities seem to be entering an era of change, with the middle class as well as the upper classes tending to confiscate the land of the poor living on the margins of the cities, destroying their rights and imposing them to relocate. For example, a great number of the residents of Langa, a slum in Cape Town, were moved to the edge of the city to beautify the frontage of the N2 Gateway settlement in 2010 [5]. Although this policy is not divided along racial or ethnic lines, it is seen as a 'second apartheid'. It was the segregation of the haves from the have-nots and ultimately exacerbated the exclusivity of informal settlements around the city.

3. Embedded Urban Design Issue: Unsafe Neighbourhoods

Most South Africans face crime on a regular basis. In Cape Town, one of the murder capitals of the world, there were 69 murders per 100,000 people in 2017-2018 [6]. Crime is mainly concentrated in areas where the poor live, with the Cape Flats being the worst offender. Unsafe neighbourhoods can therefore be considered a major embedded challenge in Cape Town, and the crime hotspots in Cape Town are shown in Figure 1 [7].
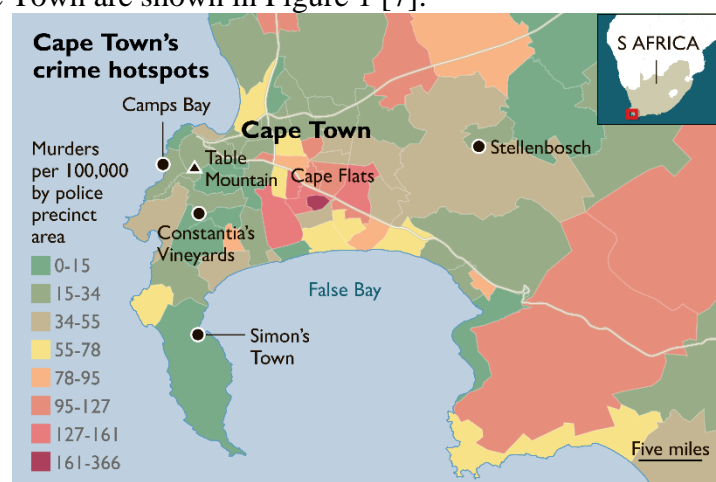

Fig.1 Cape Town's Crime Hotspots

3.1 Crime Being "Worked" in the Slums

Slums have long been seen as gathering places for the unlawful activities of the people from disadvantaged backgrounds, partly as a result of South Africa's fifty-year apartheid regime, but also as a result of the massive influx of rural people into the cities in search of livelihoods [8]. Specifically, poverty, exclusivity and youth are three interrelated factors that contribute to crime in

informal settlements. The lack of jobs in many slums that can provide income for young people leads to low incomes for young people. More importantly, the slum is considered an exclusive area because it is not part of the official settlement. In this situation, young people can only earn a living by committing crimes, mentioning increased income.

3.2 Building Construction without Design: Theoretical Support

As mentioned above, the houses in the slums are highly concentrated in small spaces, as the available land is limited. As a result, crime rates increase due to the lack of defensible space, the existence of narrow roads between huts, etc. In addition, criminals can easily break the doors and windows to enter the residence, making burglary relatively simple and straightforward. Informal housing is often poorly built because of a lack of funds to buy building materials, the ever-present threat of eviction, the temporary nature and shortages of resources and know-how. At the same time, the number of dwellings is so large, or in some cases without windows, that the public surveillance area of each dwelling is narrow, making it easy for criminals to operate. Figure 2 shows the surveillance range of a normal-density house compared to that of a high-density house.
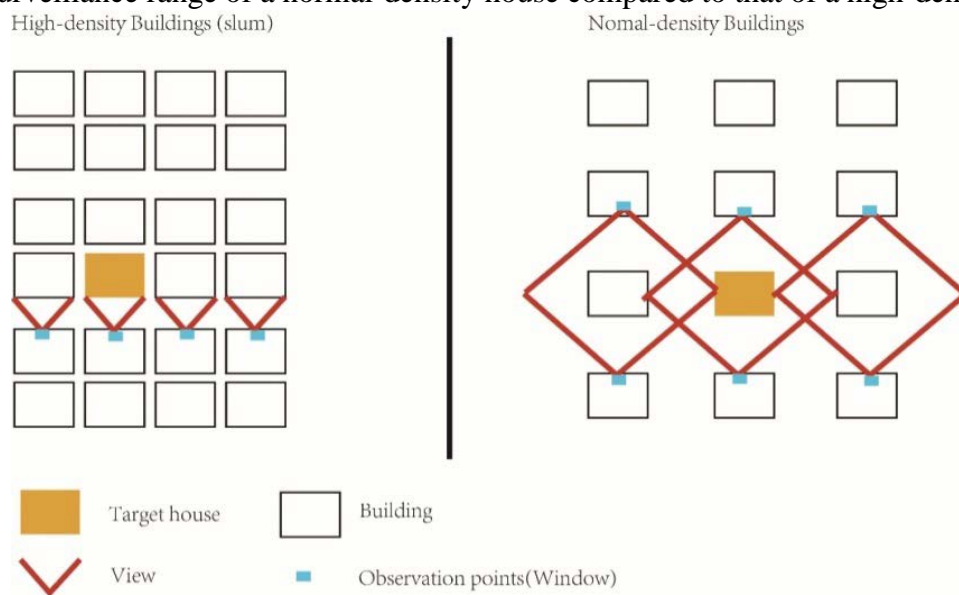

Fig.2 Public Surveillance in High-Density (Left) and Normal (Right) Communities.

3.3 Informal Neighbourhoods Lack Infrastructure and Institutions

The lack of infrastructure and institutions in the slums was exacerbated by the social inequalities created by apartheid. White neighbourhoods were safer. These neighbourhoods have more police stations despite their lower crime rates, and residents of the area are protected by infrastructures such as walls and street lights [9]. In contrast, most informal houses have little to no street lighting at night, and the complex and narrow roads increase the likelihood of outsiders entering these communities, posing a degree of danger. As a result, it is difficult for the police to monitor these informal communities and respond to criminal activity, which is another factor contributing to the very high crime rates in Cape Town's informal settlements.

4. Khayelitsha, Cape Flats: Lack of Safe Pathways to Move

Khayelitsha, situated on the Cape Flats, Cape Town, is one of the biggest slums in the world. It also has one of the highest crime rates in South Africa. The police districts serving the slum, B, Harare, and Lingelethu west reported about 200 murders, 180 sex crimes and 1,300 serious robbery cases in 2018 [10].

A direct result of the lack of safety in the area is inadequate lighting, where most pavements and paths are unsafe at night. The region's Police Commission of Inquiry found that the lack of sufficient street lighting contributed to the area's high crime rate in 2014 [11]. Critical footpaths into

public facilities such as railway stations, stations and schools are not illuminated. In areas where there is a concentration of huts, the government has built a proportion of high mast lights to provide lighting, spending around £3 million in 2019-2020 to build many of them [12]. However, residents and police officers felt that the government-built lights did not fully illuminate the passage between the huts because the buildings were too narrow [13]. Contributing to the lack of safety are the poor quality of roads in the community, dead ends and lack of open space (see Figure 3) [14]. Figure 4 shows where area, street lighting, train and bus stations, as well as schools are located in the district. As can be seen, walkways between areas or institutions are limited. It is clear that surveillance of these areas could lead to a reduction in crime rates and a reduction in vandalism if they were monitored [15].

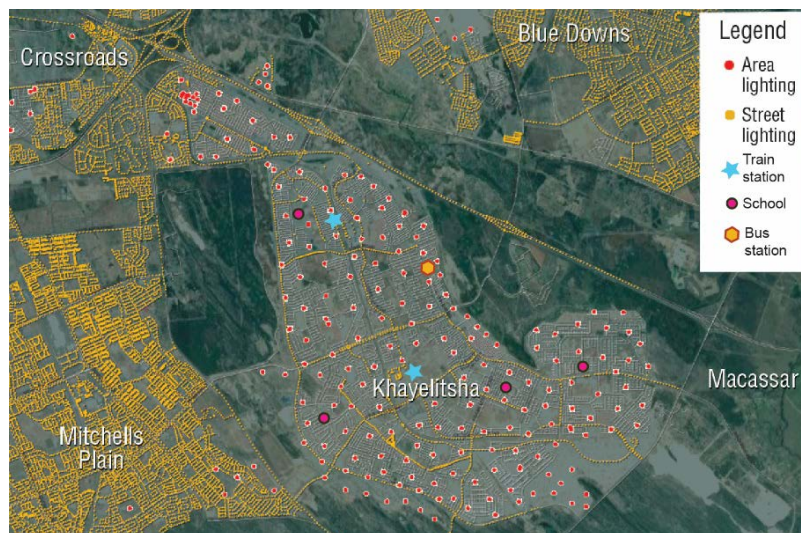Fig.3 The Lights Do Not Illuminate the Alleyway between the Shacks

Fig.4 Khayelitsha Neighbourhood Map.

4.1 Impact1: Threats to Residents

As can be seen in Figure 4, there is a lack of lighting on all roads leading to public facilities in this slum. The crime rate in these areas is very high; however, the people who live in this area have to go through to get to their destinations. The shadow effect, which refers to the shadow that extends from the light from the mast as it walks, gives away the position of the individual. It makes it easier for perpetrators to target their victims.

4.2 Impact2: Law Enforcement's Inability to Control Crime

Police cars cannot patrol the zone because of the poor quality and narrowness of roads in the slum. This has resulted in a lack of effective monitoring, which has seen an increase in crime. Law

enforcement's inability to control crime, owing to the complex conditions inherent to the slum, and it is dangerous for the police to patrol on foot, individually. For this reason, police officers rarely enter informal settlements, resulting in the relative freedom of criminal behaviour.

5. The Best Practice: Barrio Ciudad Project, Honduras

Honduras has developed into one of the most violent countries in the world. In 2019, around 1,300 people were murdered in the country [16]. This has many similarities to Khayelitsha - a violent, unsafe community. In an effort to address crime and improve the quality of life of its citizens, the Honduran government and local communities developed the Barrio Ciudad project.

The project improved the quality of life of the disadvantaged people in the city by (1) improving rudimentary services in informal settlements; (2) Consolidation of human and social capital; use of participatory planning techniques in selected communities; and (3) preventing crime and violence through design and non-design approaches. As a result of the project, residents of all participating low-income communities reported improvements in quality of life in all three core areas. Of particular importance to Khayelitsha was the greater sense of safety that residents gained through improved lighting and road design.

5.1 Design Response: Crime Prevention through Environmental Design

 Inclusive and safe trails

Poor communities are made inclusive through the construction of high quality trails. Not only do local residents regularly use such footpaths, but outside people can also explore the good access routes, increasing the flow of visitors. In the meantime, seating along the trail allows people to rest and provides natural surveillance (see Figure 5). Fear of crime can be reduced as people pass each other, or as activities occur.

Fig.5 Natural Surveillance on the Trails

 Open space

The use of well-designed open spaces can reduce the crime rate. Increased open space allows for maximum nature surveillance and increases the value of the area to the public, letting them observe the nature around them. Increased public use and well-maintained trails are designed to ensure safety and convenience. More importantly, a well-arranged open space will allow criminals less room to hide.

5.2 Lesson from the Barrio Ciudad Project

Both design and non-design measures can be applied to reduce violence and crime in slums:

 Environmental prevention

Crime prevention through environmental design is the use of environmental design to intervene in the behaviour of individuals. This is achieved through a design that increases people's sense of security by reducing exclusivity and increasing free visual space through environmental control and natural surveillance.

 Capacity building

Youth crime and domestic violence can be effectively prevented through training and technical assistance (e.g. community crime mapping and assessment) [17].

Supplementary investments and activities

It is very essential to provide adequate funding to support infrastructure and community safety projects that enhance community engagement and build a sense of kinship among inhabitants.

6. Conclusion

Fifty years of apartheid and the subsequent 'second apartheid' in Cape Town were the main causes of inequality between the formal and informal settlements. Violence and crime in slums is just another manifestation of inequality, however, designed and non-designed interventions can go some way to ameliorating the problem.

The analysis of the Khayelitsha case and the best practices carried out in Honduras led to two potential intervention approaches. Firstly, increasing accessibility to slums by constructing high quality roads can help remove barriers to inclusion and facilitate access for police vehicles. The community's sense of security is enhanced by the addition of facilities on both sides of the road to allow individuals to enhance natural surveillance. Another way to achieve this is through the reduction of building density and the creation of open spaces. Open spaces not only provide better views, but also bring people together and enhance the overall cohesion of the community.

With regard to non-designed solutions, involving the residents of informal settlements in the building of their communities is an important step. Each informal settlement is unique. The participation of residents in building or improving it not only solves local employment difficulties, but also allows the community to create its own cultural identity. Cohesive communities and low unemployment can go a long way in reducing crime. At the macro level, the South African government needs to modify its strategy regarding slums. They should not be seen as difficulties to be resolved, but as manifestations of people suffering that must be considered from a non-economic, but purely social, perspective. In this way, inequalities will be addressed at their root.

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