MISSING LINKS: NEIGHBORHOOD AND STATE INITIATIVES AGAINST CRIME IN CAPE TOWN, SOUTH AFRICA

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Keywords: South Africa, apartheid, post-apartheid, crime prevention, social regulation, urban reconstruction, community policing, urbanization.

Contents

Summary

Perceptions and experiences of crime have galvanized the South African state and communities into action, not only because crime prevention strategies are security imperatives, but also because they are a developmental necessity, central to transformation and urban sustainability. The process of engaging state and communities to work together has been difficult because the conditions that facilitate or discourage criminality are rooted in the social regulation and social fabric of communities, as well as in the linkages and ties that relate communities to each other and to state institutions. An in-depth analysis of crime prevention strategies in Delft South—a new mixed-race neighborhood in Cape Town—reveals that, while residents have prioritized crime prevention, different traditions of community organization complicate strategies to organize to prevent crime within this neighborhood.

At the same time, the state's engagement, particularly through the police and a community-policing forum, with Delft South residents and organizations has been fraught, thus missing the potential to work with the wealth of community-based crime prevention initiatives in this area. This paper illustrates the overlaps and at times conflicts—the missing links—between community-based and formal state-driven mechanisms and initiatives to prevent crime in a contemporary South African urban context.

1. Introduction

Perceived as a threat to South African transformation, violence and crime are simultaneously a legacy and product of the past and a post-apartheid manifestation of growing inequality and social frustration. Although violent crime levels have stabilized since 1996 according to the police and the Ministry of Safety and Security, crime rates in South Africa rank among the highest in the world. Most importantly, regardless of race, location, or class, citizens perceive an escalation in criminal violence and lawlessness in South African cities. In consequence, crime has galvanized the South African state and communities into action, not only because crime prevention strategies are security imperatives, but also because they are a developmental necessity, central to transformation and urban sustainability.

Battling crime is, however, extraordinarily difficult in South African cities because patterns of crime interweave with mass unemployment and a fractured social fabric in which some communities survive in dire poverty while others prosper. Crime prevention and conditions that facilitate or discourage criminality are rooted in the social regulation and social fabric of communities, as well as in the linkages and ties that relate communities to each other and to state institutions. These are the patterns and the relationships that the state must mediate to "take control" of crime and to regulate society to institute an environment of order. The negotiation of these interests and realities is not, however, an even or easy process. Neighborhoods and communities are diverse and organize themselves in different ways and state officials and institutions work with these groups in ways that reflect the particularities of community, environment and location, and broader patterns of urban differentiation, organized around race and class legacies of apartheid segregation.

Reflecting this social and economic differentiation, methods of crime prevention in communities and neighborhoods have become increasingly polarized. Wealthy citizens, predominantly but not exclusively white, opt for private security companies for protection and insulation from the vagaries of social regulation and crime prevention. South African security companies provide alarms and rapid response units that substitute for the police in preventing burglaries and property loss of cars and in homes. Poorer and predominantly African and colored citizens either become increasingly insecure and vulnerable to these patterns of lawlessness or join up with a growing number of community-based movements for self-protection. So, although crime (and the fear of crime) is a common denominator found across the city, crime patterns, police resources, and residential perceptions reflect the complex intermeshing of socio-economic realities with the organization of communities in different localities and neighborhoods.

In contrast, post-apartheid state policies for crime prevention and safety and security also have initiated, on paper at least, the possibility for an equalization of resources for crime prevention and a fundamental change in how the state—particularly the police—engages with African and colored communities. These changes are based on the principles of democracy and equality enshrined in the South African Constitution. State institutions face two imperatives in this process: meeting the demands of the public for crime prevention; and, a concomitant statutory transformation away from authoritarian

practices of the past. But shifts in the ways in which state institutions work with communities around crime have been uneven, generating diverse responses from residents and communities.

To examine the intersection (or lack thereof) of state and community programs against crime, this paper focuses on community and state activities in Delft South, a new, low-income, mixed-race neighborhood in the Cape Town area. Through the post-apartheid state's provision of permanent housing and secure tenure in 1996, African and colored families have been brought together to live in this area. An analysis of crime prevention strategies reveals that while crime prevention has been prioritized in Delft South, African and colored residents have different traditions of community organization that complicate strategies to prevent crime within this neighborhood. At the same time, the state's engagement, particularly through the police, with Delft South residents and organizations has been fraught with difficulties. This paper investigates the overlap and at times conflict—the missing links—between community-based and formal state-driven mechanisms and initiatives to prevent crime and regulate the social order in a South African urban context.

2. Authoritarian Legacies

Denied rights and representation in South Africa from the colonial period until the present democratic dispensation, African and later colored and Indian urban residents have struggled with state-imposed, authoritarian and racist systems for social regulation. Apartheid state military and policing institutions were organized to eradicate any form of African, colored, or Indian political activity or organization. Draconian methods were systematically applied across urban areas. These actions had precedence in colonial and Union (1910) policies on urbanization and the social regulation of the majority, but were accentuated in the apartheid era.

Although the apartheid state's efforts targeted community-based organizations and social movements that resisted state authority, at the same time criminal activity in African and colored communities in urban areas was not addressed by the state. To compensate for the state's neglect of crime, community organizations, in African group areas in particular, built and sustained local structures for community regulation. These organizations were based on customary law and local traditions rooted in rural areas, particularly, as Scharf writes, in the "practice of *makgotla*, *tinkundla*, *ibunga,* and *imbizo* where members of the community directly participate[d] in questions and decisions". In the post-war period of rapid African urbanization, these organizations were transferred to urban areas to compensate for the violence of the legal system perpetrated by the state. Although this transferal from rural to urban areas was a complex process, institutions have persisted in urban areas in these forms.

South African National Civic Organization (SANCO) structures are the descendents of these traditions. In particular, systems of street committees, to which all households in a street belong, amalgamate into larger area committees that form the basis of the civic structure. Within communities, these organizations deal with crime and conflict and, at the same time, negotiate with external institutions such as the state for an improvement in services and other collective needs.

Although civics and community courts do not have a perfect track record, they continue to substitute for the inadequacies of the formal legal system today because of their success in dealing with crime at the neighborhood level. The social basis for their decision-making differs substantially from the state's legal and justice system. Scharf reflects that:

In contrast to the Roman Dutch legal system based on redistributive justice, where the object is to establish blame and administer punishment, the informal courts identify responsibilities to meet needs and to promote healing and enforce values by using social pressure. Restorative justice and reintegrative shaming are two of the most important tools of the enforcement process…Indigenous township structures are more than merely courts. They are an integral part of the communalized world-view which inclines residents to compensate for the inadequacy and inappropriateness of state structures. This world-view is based on the principle of reciprocity. People obey because they know that they are going to need their peers at some future date. Family, tribe, or village solidarity is often *sine qua non* for survival. In addition to courts, they are surrogate welfare, childcare and support systems, burial societies and savings clubs, to name but a few functions. They thus form an integral part of organic township life through the country.

These types of community-based organizations reflect the inadequacy and incapacity of state-organized efforts to confront problems of criminality and lawlessness in neighborhoods. In addition, although community-based organizations that work on issues of crime prevention and safety and security are diverse—reflecting the particularities of community leadership, neighborhood conditions and location, and socio-economic realities—they are structures on which post-apartheid institutions for crime prevention may be built. These structures require close analysis to understand how their successes and failures are informed both by the linkages that tie residents together and that structure communal reciprocity and by the urban context in which they are situated. The following analysis of community-based initiatives in Delft South explores these institutional traditions and the ways in which they have been transferred informally to this new neighborhood.

3. Community-based Initiatives for Crime Prevention and Safety and Security

Facing a dearth of infrastructure, insufficient numbers of police, and escalating levels of crime, Delft South residents have taken measures to regulate their area (see Figure 1). The following discussion explores how Delft South residents and community organizations have organized around safety and security, analyzing the problems particular to this area but common to economically marginal, formerly segregated colored and African neighborhoods in the Cape Town area.

A brief introduction to Delft South is necessary first to contextualize crime prevention initiatives in the area. Housing provision was organized through the Integrated Service Land Project (ISLP) and the national and provincial Ministries of Housing, building over four thousand houses in Delft South alone. Housing beneficiaries in Delft South were drawn from specific informal settlements in former African group areas and from a racially integrated housing waiting list. The latter group of residents allocated housing from the waiting list was primarily colored because these families have been on housing

waiting lists longer than African residents. Urban residency laws in the apartheid period excluded African families up until the abolition of Influx Control Laws in the late 1980s. Families that have moved into this new neighborhood come, in consequence, from different areas of the city. The particularities of this cross-racial character and of the process of housing allocation in the area centrally structure the ways in which residents and community organizations work to prevent crime. In practice, there were three common ways to receive housing in Delft South: legal allocation by the housing office; rental from a legal owner; or illegal invasion and occupation. To analyze the diversity of initiatives found within Delft South, this paper first discusses initiatives generated in areas in Delft South where housing was illegally taken and then, second, considers the process of SANCO-initiated street committee formation in other areas of Delft South.
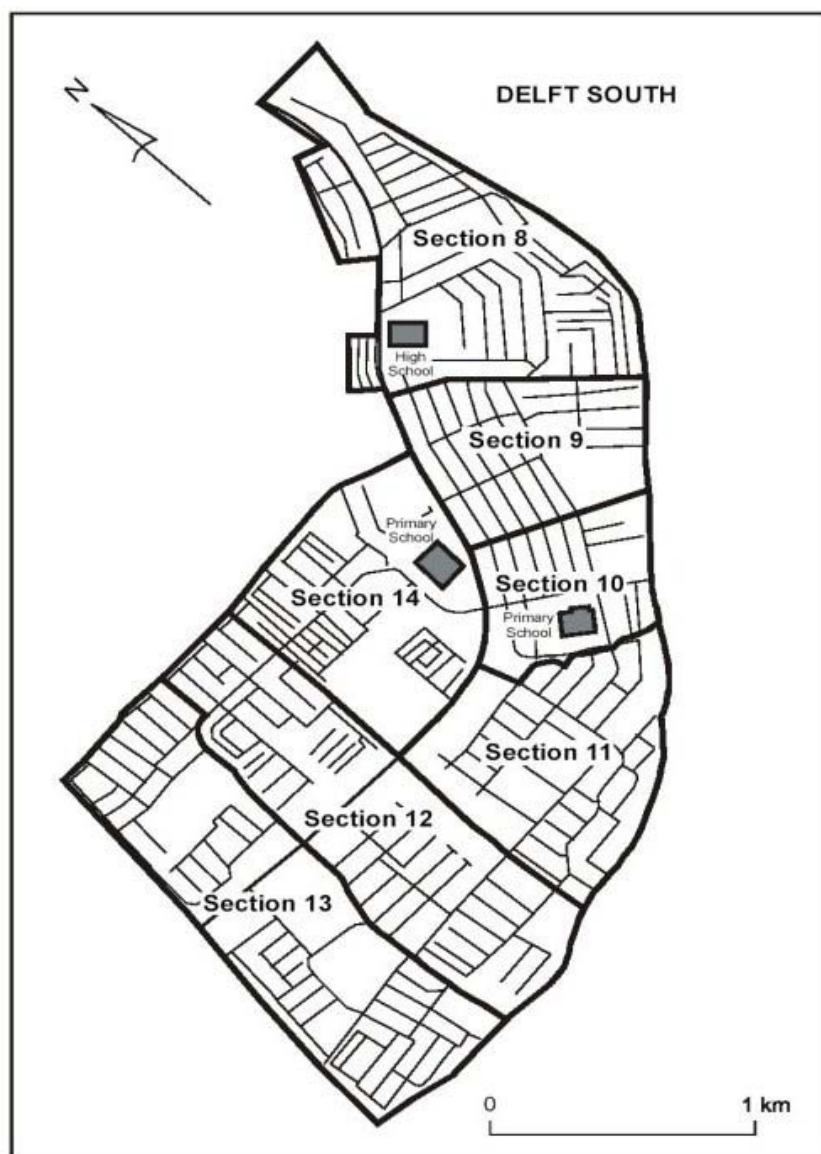

Figure 1. Map of Delft South

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Biographical Sketch

Sophie Oldfield was trained as a geographer at Syracuse University and at the University of Minnesota in the United States. Since 1997, Sophie has lectured in the Environmental and Geographical Sciences Department at the University of Cape Town, teaching development and political geography. Her research has been based primarily in South Africa. Her research focuses on the reconstruction of local government and issues of community and state reconstruction in this process. She has published on developmental local government, the South African state in transition and on issues of urban and community development.