Can social cohesion prevent collective violence: a case study of Khayelitsha

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Social Cohesion: the missing link in overcoming violence, inequality and poverty?

• 32 month mix–method international comparative study in Brazil and South Africa

• Ethnographic investigations of two interventions in Cape Town - Violence Prevention through Urban Upgrading (VPPU) and Pacifying Police Units (PPU) in Rio de Janeiro.

• This presentation focuses on the ethnographic fieldwork in Cape Town on social cohesion, violence, violence prevention and VPUU
What is Social Cohesion?

• Broad and contested concept
• Factors that ‘hold society together’
• Shared values, tolerance/recogniCon, economic inclusion, participation, networks, legitimacy
• Significant because used widely in international policy and by SA state
• Tries to understand how a democratic nation-state and society is held together.
How relevant is the concept of social cohesion to the global south?

• Little empirical work on social cohesion in the global south
• Theoretical generalistions in academic lit based on survey data from US and Western Europe
• Also being incorporated into policy sometimes problematically
• In SA focus on consensus around ‘values’, may undermine the space for different voices, democratic pluralism
Social Cohesion and violence

• How does it relate to violence?
• ‘Hypothesis’ that ‘lack’ of social cohesion or ‘weak’ social cohesion linked to lack of social control and violence
• Social cohesion can act as a ‘protective’ factor preventing violence
Collective efficacy

- social cohesion among neighbours *combined* with their willingness to intervene on behalf of the ‘common good’. (Sampson)
- About ‘converting’ social ties into effective collective action
- How residents develop a willingness to act together based on relationships of mutual trust and solidarity
- What is the common good in SA?
Khayelitsha: a context for cohesion

- Investigated social cohesion in the context of Khayelitsha township in the Western Cape and the VPPU intervention
- Conditions in Khayelitsha part of a racialized and segregated urban form created under apartheid but still in place (Gillespie 2014)
- Established in 1983 to ‘consolidate’ black settlement in the urban areas of W Cape
- High levels of unemployment and poverty (income R2000)
- Half of dwellings are shacks
- Murder rate above the national average of 31 per 100 000 (between 76 and 108 per 100 000)
- High levels of fear of violence in all social spheres (above 70%)
Networks and organisation in Khayelitsha

- Not a lack/absence of social solidarity or social networks
- Numerous forms of informal social organisation
- Many examples of individual and collective acts of support and solidarity
- ‘Stokvels’, legacy of anti-apartheid organisation
- Networks needed to survive poverty and repression
- In Khayelitsha networks channels for friendship and support and exclusion and violence
Informal networks in Khayelitsha

• Informal networks are socially and symbolically significant
• More powerful than formal institutions
• Formal institutions and informal networks co-exist and interact with each other
• Many sites of authority in the township
• Ambiguous relation to the state, formal institutions
• Expect the state to provide ‘services’ and ‘goods’
• Authority of the state, particularly the police deeply contested
Communitarianism and individualism

• Western literature on social cohesion assumes people are highly individualised
• SA-tension between individualism and communitarianism
  • ‘individualism is in the head it is not in the blood’ (interviewee)
• In Khayelitsha, mutual relations between neighbours appear to be the norm
Mutual relations

• Not individualised actors who ‘choose’ to intervene for the ‘common good’ (Sampson)

• This relationship of mutual connection is part of people’s identity, part of who they are

• Woven into the fabric of social life and social organisation
The dark side of mutual relations

• Indicator of social cohesion-do you recognise strangers in your neighbourhood?
• People in Khayelitsha ‘know’ each other but this ‘knowing’ can be a source of violent revenge
• Those who are identified as ‘criminals’ may be violently and publically punished
  • In the evening the neighbours gathered and looked for [young boys accused of robbery] Guns and any object that anyone had were brought in for the search and they were found and were tortured, they were swollen beyond recognition, they had blood and observers were calling for their death. (Field report)
Consequences of knowing neighbours

- Those who report crime are known to those who commit crime
- Fruit seller attacked at knifepoint by young gang members:
  - police take them [criminals] in today and the following day they are roaming the street and your life in danger so I thought it’s not worth [reporting the crime]
- Traditional crime prevention approaches are based on using community knowledge
- In this context ‘knowing’ can be dangerous.
Enforcing a moral community

- Relationships between neighbours also lead to the enforcement of a moral community against the ‘other’
- Organised as a violent public spectacle, a performance of moral community

- *It was roughly around lunch time when I saw people amalgamated in front of the Chinese 5 Rand’s store, carrying stones, umbrella’s and brooms from the toilets in the mall...People claimed that Chinese treat their workers [badly]and they...were singing that they must go back to China.... (Field report)*
Enforcing moral community: taxi associations

- Taxi associations play a key regulatory function
- Part of a history of informal regulation and social control in townships as a result of illegitimate government under apartheid
- More powerful presence than police
- Known for the use of coercive force
- Key role in controlling youth gang violence
- Support for the violence of taxi associations and other forms of violent collective organisation
VPUU-intervening in conditions of violence and contestation

• Established through a partnerships between the City of Cape Town and the German Development bank in 2004

• Aims to reduce violence and improve the quality of life in Khayelitsha

• Heavily influenced by international models –UNHabitat, WHO, German Development Bank

• Why an urban upgrading approach was taken is not explicit

• Effect of upgrading on violence reduction contested
An integrated approach

• VPUU is primarily an urban upgrading initiative
• Links this to ‘workstreams’ that seek to improve the quality of life of citizens through social crime prevention
• Address sustainability through institutional crime prevention, supporting local organisations to take ownership of spaces
HSRC analysis

• Didn’t collect quantitative data to ‘prove’ impact

• Important to understand the context in which the intervention was located, the process through which it was implemented and the perspective of community members on its outcome

• Ethnography involves spending an extended period in a community, getting to understand it holistically

• Allows an understanding of the meanings, beliefs, values and practices of community members themselves

• Tries to understand human experience on its own terms and not judge
VPUU and social cohesion

• Draws on ‘South American models’ that focus on the building of community cohesion and social capital (Khayelitsha Commission)
• VPUU emphasises the importance of community ownership of the process of development
• Participatory methodology, ‘strives for negotiated solutions in cooperation with communities’-key success factor
• Claims community engagement processes and creation of ‘democratic’ forums have built social cohesion
A technical intervention

• Seeks to formalise both space and social relations
• Create ‘managed urban space’
• How to create ‘order’ in a deeply informal, contested environment?
• Responds to this by trying to create an explicitly ‘apolitical’, technical intervention
• Both in terms of who implements (a consulting company) and how the intervention takes place
• Reality of elite capture of development processes, patronage etc.
Alternative structures

- Creates its own structures parallel to existing organisations to ensure its development objectives are met
- Seeks to avoid political entanglement
- Safe Node Area Committee (SNAC)-main decision making structure
- Organisations invited to participate based on an audit by VPUU
- Community participation is ‘designed’ (Piper)
- Leadership who are ‘trustees’ of the project rather than community representatives (Piper)
‘Neutral’ engagement with communities

• Engagement with communities are through surveys which are seen as ‘neutral’ and representative of all opinions
  • *it’s a way of ensuring that we get an opinion which is independent of any other kind of gate keeping structures or political affiliations which are in place, so that the voice of the community can emerge. (Khayelitsha Commission)*

• Baseline surveys-largely demographic information, some questions on willingness to participate in crime prevention initiatives, mapping of ‘holy sites’, social gathering places

• Passive sampling of attitudes rather than an active and collective engagement with residents (Piper)
The responsible citizen

- Utilises managerial, business language and practice
- Wants to create the classic business ‘entrepreneur’
- Emphasises rules, correct processes
- Will only engage with ‘responsible’ residents who follow rules and business practices
- Many contractual obligations have to be met for CPFs to receive funding including- ‘accurate data on membership’, incident reports by each NW member, ‘development contract’ between CPF and each volunteer.
- Few of these SLA have been successful
Formalisation of trading

• Key site where tensions between formality and informality is contestation around the creation of formal stalls for trading
• Informal trading sites demolished and now traders pay rent, have a ‘contract’ with VPUU
• Struggle to pay rent and are now in debt
• Provide important services e.g. access to water, electricity etc.
Formalisation of trading

- Informal trading is shaped by social relations that are not simply about the extraction of profit but about sharing resources.
- Seen as destroying relationships of support and independence that underpinned informal businesses.
- Dictating what business practices traders can engage in.
- Not allowed to manage businesses on own terms.
- Entrepreneurial ‘training’ viewed as patronising, undermining the agency and experience of traders.
Conclusion – Can social cohesion prevent collective violence

• Networks of support which could be mobilised to prevent violence

• Significant amounts of collective violence in defence of exclusionary forms of social cohesion

• Bonding rather than bridging forms of solidarity (Putnam)

• How do we use existing networks of cooperation and recognise residents own values and beliefs to support violence prevention and build social cohesion?