

THE SLUM NEIGHBORHOOD : "COMMUNITY SAVED" A LITERATURE REVIEW

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Proponents of the "community lost" argument maintain that kinship and community affinities have been gravely weakened, lost, or destroyed as a result of urbanization, industrialization, and bureaucratization (see Hunter, 1978; Wellman & Leighton, 1979). They see the modern urbanite as an "alienated isolate" who must face his problems alone. On the other hand, "community saved" or "community found" scholars maintain that bureaucratic institutions (which have supposedly weakened or destroyed kinship and community attachments) have worked the opposite way to encourage the maintenance of family and primary relationships as sources of sociability and support (Hunter, 1978; Wellman & Leighton, 1979).

This paper will take the "community saved" argument focusing on the slum neighborhood -- an inevitable segment of mass society. It will show by means of reviewing the literature on slums and slum societies that community still exists in the urban society.

The Slum Area

First, the composition of slums, why the slums are the choice of its residents, and the general characteristics of slum areas will be discussed. Knowing the slum dwellers and their problems will give insight as to why solidarity in the urban setting is of utmost importance to them.

The big cities hold an almost irresistible attraction to the poor populations from rural America, the blacks in particular, and the various ethnic groups from other countries who have immigrated to the U.S. They are idealized as places where "the enslaved and downtrodden" can find freedom and opportunity for advancement, where improved living conditions and better life chances are available.

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(Berry & Kasarda, 1977; Canty, 1969; Roebuck, 1974). Unfortunately for these dreamers seeking fulfillment in the big city, many of them end up living in the inner city's crowded slum, probably not much better off than their original Situation.

Some of the major reasons why slums become the residential areas of urban migrants are obvious.

1. The slums are close to the Central Business District where employment opportunities are available (Berry & Kasarda, 1977; Gans, 1962; Mowitz & Wright, 1962; Orr, 1975). The poor do not have the means of mobility to travel back and forth from home to work nor can they afford the time required to travel; therefore, the accessibility offered by the inner city is attractive.
2. It is in the slums where low-cost housing is available (Gans, 1962; Orr, 1975). The lower status population and migrant groups cannot afford the newer and more desirable housing in the suburbs (Farley, 1964; Roebuck, 1974).
3. They are often without choice either because they are poor, uneducated, colored, etc. (Canty, 1969; Gans, 1962; Roebuck, 1974).

Furthermore, Michelson (1970), in discussing ethnic ghettos, stated that ethnic identity is still very strong today, and people of the same ethnic origin are clustered together. In some cases, where groups are disadvantaged by a lack of skills or by skin color, they are forced upon themselves; in other cases, people choose to remain together for various benefits which their propinquity can provide.

The slums are characterized by poverty or low income, high crime rates and delinquency, ignorance or poor education, squalor, racial injustices (Banfield, 1977; Gans, 1962; Porteous, 1977; Roebuck, 1974; Suttles, 1968), and sometimes even subversive beliefs and activities (Whyte, 1955). Despite these conditions, however, many slum dwellers do prefer high density slum environments (Porteous, 1977) and they do not regard their dwelling environment as a slum (Gans, 1962; Porteous, 1977). Michelson (1970) added that lifestyle is one reason why people prefer to live in high-density environments. Talking about the West Enders, he said that they never idealized their housing itself. What they valued was the combination of type of building and siting of buildings relative to each other, the streets, and commercial land uses which brought people into frequent, spontaneous, and intense contact with their relatives. In other words, the high density of the slum environment supported their lifestyle.

Furthermore, through coping mechanisms available to them, they are able to adapt to the harsh realities of the slum environment. They create a "Community" with a meaningful social structure through strong kinship and neighbor contacts and such institutions as religion, recreation, and others. As Wellman and

Leighton (1979) noted, definitions of community often include the following ingredients : *"networks of interpersonal ties which provide sociability and support to members, residence in a common locality, and solidarity sentiments and activities"* (p. 365). This paper will review a number of studies conducted in several slum areas and will attempt to show how the slum neighborhood meets the criteria of community.

Some Examples from the Literature

Suttles (1968) in his study of the Addams Area (a slum environment in Chicago populated by four ethnic groups) said that it has been the first place of settlement for migrants from other places in the U.S. as well as immigrants from abroad. For newly arriving migrant groups with little resources, the slum is a haven where they can find affordable shelter and friendship until they are able to find employment and fend for themselves. Suttles noted the ability of the slum to knit people together to form a community they identify with and consider their home.

For example, four ethnic groups resided in the Addams Area : Negroes, Italians, Mexicans, and Puerto Ricans. Each of these ethnic groups from their own communities, each carrying on their respective institutional activities, communicating in their own unique ways, and forming their own primary groupings. Ethnic solidarity is strong among these four groups, but not as strong as among the Italians. Suttles said that although these sections are badly divided, there is solidarity in face of a neighborhood crisis (such as a threatened invasion by antagonists from another community). Negroes will fight other Negroes from another community to show the unity of the Addams Area residents. Ethnic considerations are brushed aside for territorial unity. The reason for this, according to Suttles, is that "it is more comforting to have an enemy from outside the area" (p. 35). The slum residents know who their enemies are and any kind of friction is on a face-to-face level. In the slums, relations of any type are on a face-to-face, personal basis, which make for more intense relationships.

Firey (1945) maintains that there is more to spatial location and activities than an economic relationship as traditional ecologists maintain. He states two more variables, sentiment and symbolism, which residents hold for their locations. To illustrate his point, the North End (a slum area populated by Italians) has a very solid grouping. The community is more than a place to live in -- it is also a place where they can pursue the same customs, traditions, and other practices they had in their original homeland. It can be seen here that solidarity results in ethnic groups being less residentially mobile than native-born populations and that they are not as vulnerable to and conscious about socioeconomic success than the higher classes.

Porteous (1977) states that there is sufficient evidence to support the fact that high-density slum environments are preferred by many because of the kinship and neighborhood contacts they afford. Citing a study by Fried and Gleicher of the West End in Boston, Porteous says :

Most of the West End's inhabitants experienced a variety of satisfactions from living in the area, notably because of strong kinship and neighbor contacts The home vicinity was perceived to be an extension of the home, and to many . . . their neighborhood, if not the whole of West End, was home. Social life occurred in an almost uninterrupted flow between apartment and street, a life-style totally inhibited by high-rise towers or suburban layouts. In short, the West Enders felt that they belonged, that the West End was part of their identity. (p. 299)

Gans (1962) in his study also of West End, in particular its Italian community, emphasized the importance of the "peer group society" which provided companionship and feelings of belongingness to its members. Based primarily on members having the same age, sex, and life cycle, another important criterion was kinship. Members had to be compatible in terms of background, interests, and attitudes towards marriage, child-rearing, religion, politics, etc., resulting in peer groups being limited to people of similar ethnic background and class. The West Enders lived within the group--they did not like to be alone.

The peer group allowed its members to be individuals in that competition for respect, power, and status was encouraged. However, although individuality was encouraged, the peer group also strictly enforced social control. In-group loyalty and conformity to established standards of personal behavior and interpersonal relations were the criteria used to evaluate members. The secondary group, which included the church, voluntary organizations, economic establishments, and others were important to the extent they supported the workings of the peer group. The outside world was considered object-oriented and was always regarded suspiciously. Thus, with the emphasis placed on the peer group, the "urban villagers" were isolated from the outside world, and it was this isolation that rendered the West Enders unable to deal with the political and economic forces that threatened their community through urban development.

In his study of "Jelly's", a bar and liquor store located in a run-down building on the South Side of Chicago, *Anderson* (1978) states the importance of the bar in providing a setting for sociability and a place where neighborhood residents can gain a sense of self-worth. Serving as a hangout for poor black people, mostly men who see themselves as deviant or as lacking in moral responsibility by wider community standards, Jelly's was a place where these men feel themselves equals

and where they have a chance to be somebody. Anderson referred to this small, ongoing close-knit gathering of individuals engaged in face-to-face interaction as the "extended primary group" which gives its members a "we" feeling. Members of the extended primary group work to construct standards of conduct that they can meet and demonstrate during social interaction.

Whyte (1955) studied an Italian ghetto which people call disorganized and concluded that it had a highly structured internal organization. He also described the social solidarity that existed in Boston's North End. In this study of street corner gangs, Whyte points to the strong primary ties of gang members and how the sentiments and loyalties of the groups served to organize the day-to-day life of the community's residents. His analysis of one of the gang leader's attempts to be elected for office emphasized the loyalty of ethnic neighborhoods to one of their own.

Territorial Meaning and Social Functions of the Slum

The examples cited above demonstrate the territorial meaning attached to the slum by its residents as well as its social functions. In his study of the Addams Area, Suttles (1968) demonstrates how territorial meaning comes about in the cities. First, he observes that past analyses of territorial groupings have been centered on the locality group since it is necessary for this group to coexist peacefully. Furthermore, he states that most societies have public moralities with standards very difficult for some of their members to live up to, and one of these societies is the United States. The U.S. possesses a public morality with standards beyond the capability of many of its citizens in terms of trustworthiness and respectability. Those who believe that they reach these standards and wish to pursue these ideals are normally those persons in the higher socioeconomic brackets. In turn, they believe that those people in the low socioeconomic bracket do not meet or are not capable of meeting the standards set by society, and thus are not trustworthy and respectable. Rather than accept the deviations from the moral order made by the lower groups, these more fortunate people retreat to the suburbs, leaving the inner city to the poor, unsuccessful, and disreputable, resulting in territorial segregation.

No other part of the urban setting has probably been more subject to stereotypes than the slum areas. For example, in two separate studies by Suttles (1968) and Whyte (1955) of Italian slum areas, they stated that outsiders regarded these as centers of crime and depravity, congestion, poverty, and other ills not manifested in other areas of society. As naturally as the human body comes up with defense mechanisms when it is attacked by antibodies, the same is true for slum dwellers. To cope with the stereotypes levelled at them by society, it is necessary for them to come up with some mechanisms to cope with, or at least

neutralize the accusations and insults directed at them. This section of the paper will be focused on the various way observed by the above authors as the means by which slum dwellers in the areas studied handled the stereotypes aimed at them as well as the coping mechanisms they utilized to make their plight more bearable and less oppressive.

Effectively segregated from and ostracized by the rest of society, the slum dwellers have nothing to fall back on except themselves. Possessing no alternatives and condemned to live in the slum area for economic reasons, they come up with their own social devices to more or less counteract the effects of their exclusion from society.

One of the ways is by retreating into their own provincial world with its own morality, one which differs from the wider society's morality and one which they can live up to. In a sense, it is a continuation of the morality they adhered to in their place of origin. At the same time, they are not rejecting the wider society's morality as they feel it is still necessary to protect them from others unlike themselves in the society. What this results in is a double standard where a member's violation of the wider morality may not necessarily mean he is breaking his own group's morality. However, where it concerns an outsider, he will always be judged using the wider society's criteria. This continuation of a distinct morality gives a slum dweller a firmer base to stand on and furthermore contributes to the provincialism and territorial meaning of his slum area. This adherence to both societal and provincial moralities is illustrated by Suttles in his portrayal of the Italian residents, in particular, in Addams Area.

Another way slum dwellers cope with the stereotypes and labels by society is by believing that these only apply to other residents in the slum area. Privately, they think that they are not bad, despicable, and untrustworthy as the general public thinks. However, they do not think in the same way for their neighbors, whom they may regard with as much suspicion and distrust as the general public area. Therefore, the need for a defense mechanism arises to protect themselves--this time, from other residents in their neighborhood. Suttles mentioned several ways of doing this : by restricting their social interactions to their own kin or ethnic groupings, or where these are not sufficient, to develop personal relationships based on a long and intensive inquiry into the other person's backgrounds. These account for the face block and defended neighborhoods of Suttles. In the face block, residents of the block know each other personally or at least by face due to their proximity and use of common facilities. It is usually the face block which parents consider as the "world" for their children.

The defended neighborhood (DN) is considered by its residents as a sanctuary where they can be relatively safe from outsiders. In effect, what occurs

here is another level of territorial grouping -- this time, groupings within an area. As opposed to the first level of territorial groupings where the low-status people are segregated from the high-status groups, this new level is the division of the low-status people based on other factors not socioeconomic in nature, such as kin groups, ethnic groups, etc. This kind of neighborhood is again typified by the Addams Area of Suttles which has four ethnic groups (Italians, Negroes, Mexicans, and Puerto Ricans). Each of the areas in Addams populated by these ethnic groups is a defended neighborhood. As stated, defended neighborhoods are formed primarily because of a fear of invasion from adjacent areas. The streetcorner gangs as depicted by both Whyte and Liebow serve to deter incursions from adjoining areas by their presence on the streetcorners every night, and the same story goes for other neighborhoods which have gangs of their own for the same purpose. In other words, the DN serves to delimit the boundaries where its residents can safely go about their business and their social movement. In fact, it is these boundaries which essentially characterize DNs in addition to the fact that territorial identity is also strong. Going beyond the DN's boundaries will mean being in enemy territory, therefore, the DNs work in such a way that conflicts are avoided or at least, minimal in occurrence.

Since mention has been made of the streetcorner gangs, it is proper to mention here that they are another way of coping with ostracism. As indicated above, streetcorner gangs perform an important role in defended neighborhoods, as it is them that discourage intrusions by other gangs from surrounding territories. This gives the gang members a sense of purpose. Furthermore, for the gang members who think of themselves as failures, the streetcorner group possesses shadow values which permit these members to be men once again in their own eyes, and also provides a sanctuary for those men who cannot take failure anymore (Anderson, 1978; Liebow, 1967; Whyte, 1955).

Other ways, most probably the most important ones, of making the slum environment less oppressive are the respective cultures of the slum dwellers themselves. Such factors as language, customs and traditions, institutions, and so forth are means of taking a slum dweller's mind away from his hardships. The continuance of cultural practices is only possible where there is a sufficient number of people sharing them and they are congregated in one territory -- the slum area is the best possible setting for this. It is also known that people with a common plight, especially that looked down on by society, form the most solid groupings as exemplified by the Italian community in Addams. Thus, even in the most adverse of living conditions, slum dwellers are able to survive because of their territorial unity made possible by a common culture. In fact, it is evident in Suttles' study that it is the Italian community that has managed to fare better because of the stronger cultural, ethnic and kinship ties they can lean back on. For example, none

of the other ethnicities in Suttles' study possessed religiosity stronger than among the Italians. For the Italians, religion serves to buoy them up and enable them to tolerate better the conditions they live under. The Negroes, who do not have the strong cultural and kinship ties the Italians possess, are less able to cope with their slum environment than the Italians, and as seen in Liebow's and Anderson's study of Negro streetcorner men and their families, are more dejected and hopeless.

Conclusions

Going back to the main question of whether "community" is found in slum areas, from the evidence presented focusing on slum neighborhoods, the answer appears to be positive. Urbanization and bureaucratic institutions have not resulted in loss of community in the slums--on the contrary, community is still very much alive there. What the social structure produced by urbanization seems to have done, with its complexities and impersonal regard for the individual, is push these individuals together to form a united front to cushion its effects on their lives. Particularly in the slums, with their ubiquitous conditions of poverty, ignorance, and racial injustices, the need for solidarity is even more apparent. The impersonal nature of the urban social structure and its prejudice against and condemnation of the slum has been counteracted by slum residents pursuing more intense personal contacts among themselves and their creation of a subculture with values they accept and standards they can meet. "Never mind what society thinks; we're doing good by us" (or something to that effect) is one expression of what a typical slum dweller might think of his world and the society at large.

The community in the slum has been based primarily on kinship and ethnicity--"birds of the same feather flock together" as illustrated in the ethnic segments of the Addams Area which formed defended neighborhoods, or the peer group society of the West Ender, or the extended primary group at Jelly's Bar in a black neighborhood, or the street corner societies of "the Nortons" and "Chick's Club". Residing in a common locality, these groupings pursue their day-to-day activities based on the sentiments and loyalties engendered on their members by the groups. To the extent that their various institutions support their activities, the groupings place so much emphasis on them as necessary. The slum neighborhood, in spite of what it does not have, does give its members a sense of closeness and belongingness, of sharing the same values, of sharing a common plight--one which is difficult to find in the more impersonal suburbanites' neighborhoods where, most often, the criterion for entry is socioeconomic status--a rather temporary state when compared to the more lasting nature of kinship and ethnicity bonds found in the slum. It can't be helped but to point out here the existence of wealthy members of particular ethnic groups in slum areas who opt to remain with their "brethren" because of a common culture and lifestyle (Michelson, 1970). All the ingredients of community are found in the slum neighborhoods: "community lost" has been "saved", so to speak.

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