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ORGANIZED CRIME

LIFTING THE VEIL ON EXTORTION IN CAPE TOWN

PETER GASTROW

APRIL 2021



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AUTHOR'S NOTE

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

CCID	Cape Town Central City Improvement District
GI-TOC	Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime
SAPS	South African Police Service
SPS	Specialized Security Services




There has been a surge in reported incidents of extortion in central Cape Town and parts of the Cape Flats (shown here) since the latter half of 2020. © View Apart/Shutterstock



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Extortion is enforced through intimidatory violence, often by armed perpetrators, and needs to be recognized as a serious threat. © Shaun Swingler



Extortion is not likely to be uppermost in the minds of those South Africans, or the tens of thousands of international tourists, businesspersons and migrants who regularly flock to Cape Town to enjoy the beauty and prospects that the city has to offer. The attractions are many, which is why international tourist rating organizations, such as Travel and Leisure and CNN Travel, have ranked Cape Town as one of the top city destinations in the world.¹ But speak to Marcus Oliver,² who arrived in Cape Town from Europe about ten years ago to open a restaurant, or to Abdullah Omar, a Somali spaza shop owner who fled Somalia in 2006 to build a new life in Cape Town,³ and their praise for Cape Town has become more muted. Marcus Oliver lamented, 'If I had wanted to come to Cape Town to invest in a restaurant now, and I knew what I know now, I would have thought twice.' Abdullah Omar, meanwhile, will tell you that he is lucky to be alive because scores of his fellow Somali shop owners have been killed during the past few years for refusing to pay extortion fees (not to mention those who have been subjected to continual waves of xenophobic violence).

For the average Cape Town resident, extortion has become associated with the targeting of downtown bars and nightclubs, or foreign migrant-owned shops in townships. It is a crime that tends to be regarded as affecting mainly 'others'. Other forms of violent crime, such as theft and burglary, are seen as having a more direct impact on the city's wider population, and these elicit greater concern.

Furthermore, extortion is not a crime that many fully understand or that is easy to prove in court. Some see it as a nebulous concept, an 'invisible' crime somehow involving threats and the payment of money, but with no clear signs of evidence left in its wake. This may be partly because extortion is not defined in legislation in the South African legal system, although a definition has developed through historical legal influences. It is categorized as a common law crime in South Africa, and case law is the key reference source for a definition of extortion. The South African Police Service (SAPS), together with its specialized investigative unit, the Hawks, have borrowed from case law and apply a widely accepted definition of extortion: 'Taking from another some patrimonial or non-patrimonial advantage by intentionally and unlawfully subjecting that person to pressure which induces him or her to submit to the taking.'⁴ Extortion therefore means threatening a person with a harmful act unless he or she submits to demands being made that

The nature of extortion is such that victims tend to regard it in their own interest to conceal the transaction and not to report it.

are for the benefit the extortioner. The nightclub or restaurant owner in central Cape Town who is pressurized to pay a monthly 'protection fee' in the face of a direct or indirect threat by individuals who otherwise threaten to disrupt the normal operation of the establishment is being subjected to extortion. (Where a similar transaction for the provision of genuine security services is entered into voluntarily with a reputable security company and without any threats being made, that is, by contrast, a legitimate contract that many urban home owners have entered into.)

The very nature of extortion is such that both criminal and victim tend to regard it in their own interest to conceal the transaction and not to report it to others, including the police. The environment of fear and intimidation they face means many victims choose not to speak out, to avoid risking the possible consequences of exposing the extortion activities to the police. That choice tends to be a much more costly option, however, and one that plays into the hands of the extortioners, who then continue to extort funds, often ratcheting up the regular amounts to be paid. It is a vicious cycle that has to be broken.

In the past, public discussion about extortion in South Africa was limited and media coverage sporadic. Reports focused mainly on isolated instances of extortion in the entertainment and nightclub areas of central Cape Town. Extortion-linked murders of foreign nationals running shops also received only occasional coverage. But the silence around extortion changed significantly during 2020. From about August and September 2020, the media began to increasingly report on a significant expansion of extortion rackets in central Cape Town. The phenomenon, reportedly, was no longer confined to the night-time entertainment industry but increasingly affected small day-time businesses, including restaurants and coffee bars. This is likely to have been linked to the effect of the COVID-19 lockdown restrictions, which affected the night-time entertainment industry. More alarmingly, reports appeared of a surge in extortion incidents in township areas on the periphery the city. In places such as Khayelitsha, Gugulethu and Philippi, South African residents were being targeted by extortion gangs. Locals, already struggling with high unemployment rates in a depressed economy, which had been further weakened by tough COVID-19 lockdown regulations, were emerging as victims of extortion. It had long been known that foreign nationals had been targeted in townships by extortion gangs, but ordinary South African township residents had hardly been affected. The phenomenon was clearly taking a new face.

Authorities from all tiers of government took note, and soon the Cape Town city authorities, the Western Cape provincial government, as well as the National Police Minister, undertook to address the issue.⁵ The police minister underlined the urgency of the matter and, in September 2020, appointed a steering committee that would crack down on extortion rackets in Cape Town. Extortion was suddenly being propelled to the top of the priority list. This new sense of urgency was reflected in a flurry of media headlines at the time.⁶

The dates of these reports indicate how the focus shifted from Cape Town city's businesses and night life (on 10 September 2020) to the townships, and to the havoc wreaked there by extortion on the local economy and residents (on 4 November). The dates of the reports accord with what transpired in reality. Extortion in the townships,

and the crisis levels that ensued, had not been a priority for the media or the police until about September/October 2020. Only a few dedicated journalists were burrowing away in that highly complex environment. The public, the media and authorities were caught by surprise by these developments. However, victims, both in central Cape Town and in the townships, were less surprised.

This research report attempts to explore these developments, which occurred during the second half of 2020 in the Cape urban area. It examines what conditions brought the extortion economy to the fore and the nature of the extortion activities. By analyzing who is involved and who are the victims, it seeks to assess how critical this situation is, as well as its impact on development, businesses, tourism, and on the safety and security of residents and communities in the greater Cape Town area.

Structure of the report

As is the case in general with research into organized crime, it is difficult to obtain a first-hand version of what happened directly from either the victim or perpetrator of extortion. The victim's reticence is explained by fear of possible retribution from the extortioners, should they find out that information has been reported to the police or revealed to a researcher. Undertaking a study of this nature is therefore hidebound by constraints. The first section therefore explains the methodology that informed this report.

The next sections look at the two main geographic study areas: central Cape Town and the large township of Khayelitsha. The City of Cape Town (the urban area that falls under the government of the metropolitan municipality) is substantial, with an area of 2 446 square kilometres and a coastline of 295 kilometres. It is South Africa's second largest economic centre and most populous city after Johannesburg, with a current estimated population of about 4 710 000.⁷ Cape Town's significant size, and the constraints under which this study was undertaken, including two lockdowns to contain the COVID-19 pandemic, meant that not all residential areas could be covered or all extortion networks explored in this study.

Selecting these two focus areas in no way suggests, however, that the remaining Cape Town suburbs are not afflicted by extortion rackets. Many suburbs in the Cape Flats area are notorious for gang-related violence, and experience very high crime rates, including extortion activity.⁸ Cape Town's northern suburbs, including the Bellville area, as well as more peripheral areas, such as the Strand in the east and Du Noon in the West, have also been targeted but are beyond the scope of this report.

The second section considers how the extortion markets in central Cape Town have evolved, looks at some of the main actors linked to extortion rackets and the rivalry between the networks, and provides case studies in which extortion victims relate their experiences. Central Cape Town, for the purpose of this report, includes the 'city bowl' business centre and the Atlantic seaboard suburbs of Green Point, Mouille Point, Sea Point and Camps Bay. These are relatively wealthy areas in which the majority of residents are white.



FIGURE 1: Greater Cape Town area, central Cape Town and Khayelitsha.

Section 3 focuses on Khayelitsha, its criminal gangs and the development of its extortion markets. Khayelitsha is the largest township in Cape Town and contains extensive, impoverished shack areas.⁹ Little is known about Khayelitsha's criminal economy or the criminal networks involved.

With regard to these selected study sites, it is helpful to understand the layout of Cape Town in so far as it relates to extortion. Apartheid laws shaped the current spatial architecture of the city. Under the apartheid Group Areas Act of 1950, racial groups were allocated separate residential and business areas across greater Cape Town. This residential segregation along racial lines continues to have a lasting impact on the city. Although, today, legal impediments to the acquisition or rental of property in Cape Town based on race no longer exist, the racial groups to which specific urban residential areas were assigned under apartheid remain the dominant groups living there today. For example, Coloured people continue to live in large numbers in certain parts of the Cape Flats, while townships such as Khayelitsha, continue to have an overwhelmingly black majority population. The same applies to areas predominantly inhabited by white communities. A 2021 map indicating where Cape Town's ethnic communities predominantly live therefore looks very similar to the map that the apartheid ideologues worked with half a century ago. This is pertinent to this report.

Extortion comes in various forms and targets different sectors of society and the economy. The different ways in which extortion is executed depend largely on the characteristics of the target markets and locations. For example, extortion targeting the transport industry will differ from extortion activity at building sites or in the city's nightlife economy. In the fourth section, some of these different typologies of extortion recorded in areas other than central Cape Town and Khayelitsha are briefly dealt with.

Section 5 synthesizes the information about extortion that has come to the fore as a result of this study, summarizing the developments that have taken place in central Cape Town and Khayelitsha since the latter half of 2020. The final section offers policy recommendations for addressing the extortion problem in the areas under study here.

Methodology

Obtaining reliable information is a challenge for any organized-crime researcher who seeks to go beyond desktop research to obtain first-hand information from witnesses, victims or perpetrators. This is especially the case when gathering primary information relating to extortion. A key defining feature of extortion is that unlawful pressure or intimidation is applied to targets, and victims who are approached for interviews to share their stories fear the real prospect of further intimidation, as well as physical or financial harm, or reputational damage. The risk is enough to deter victims from speaking to journalists, researchers, or even the police, about their experiences.

A major factor that prevented proper field research for this study – and personal meetings and interviews with respondents – from taking place was the fact that the study was undertaken from November 2020 to February 2021, when partial or complete COVID-19 lockdowns were in place while South Africa was experiencing its second infection surge. Physical meetings or contact interviews during that period would have

From about August to September 2020, the media increasingly reported on a significant expansion of extortion rackets in Cape Town.



Many suburbs in the Cape Flats area are known for gang-related violence and experience high crime rates, including extortion activity. © Mark Fisher/Shutterstock

been high-risk exercises and irresponsible. With a few exceptions, online meeting platforms and telephone interviews were relied on for communicating. It is possible to obtain information in that manner but it is a weak substitute for personal contact and routine field research.

Despite these impediments, interviews were conducted with 30 respondents. All prospective participants were provided with an information note to familiarize them with the purpose of the study, and to explain the role of the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC) and which role players the GI-TOC would brief.

Interviews were unstructured and based on a qualitative approach, which allowed for open questions and considerable discussion. Interviews were undertaken with individuals who had been extorted, people who had personal knowledge of extortion rackets, such as leading figures within the Somali community, representatives from the City of Cape Town municipal council, provincial government, the media and organized business.

Only one police officer was interviewed. It is regrettable that the leadership team of the SAPS did not

respond to requests to brief them and to collaborate in this study. The offices of the provincial and national commissioners of police were provided with information about the purpose of this study; briefings were offered should more details be required; and a written request for authority to speak to members of the police about extortion, as required by the police, was supplied to both offices, but to no avail. The National Commissioner's office did not acknowledge receipt of the communications, while the office of the Provincial Commissioner did, but did not take the author's request to interview police officers further. This attitude stands in contrast to senior Cape Town police officers with knowledge of extortion and organized crime who were approached and requested for interviews. They were willing to do so but, understandably, requested that approval from the Provincial Commissioner be first obtained to authorize their participation. As mentioned, despite written requests, no authorization was received. This may be due to the internal crisis that the Western Cape Police has been experiencing. The SAPS in the Western Cape appears to be adrift.¹⁰ Divisive and destructive factional and personal battles have been taking place within police leadership in the province and, in December



2020, the entire top chain of command of SAPS Crime Intelligence was suspended.¹¹

Even though there is a widely held view among criminologists that when researching organized crime there should not be an excessive reliance on law-enforcement information, this is something that researchers should themselves decide upon without being tied to a hard-and-fast rule. This report would have been enriched had there been better participation by the police.

It was explained that anonymity would be available to those respondents who sought it. With few exceptions, victims interviewed requested anonymity and an assurance that they would not be identifiable in any manner. Throughout this report, therefore, actual names are either not given or aliases are used. Precise addresses or specific locations where extortion took place have not been provided either, and the nature of the business involved has not been accurately described. Where, for example, the owner of a general dealer shop in the suburb of Sea Point was extorted, the report might mention that the extortion took place elsewhere – for example, in central Cape Town. While a necessary measure to protect

the respondents from harm, it is unfortunate that this form of obfuscation had to be resorted to because the public, law enforcement agencies, and policymakers would surely be interested in precise addresses and names of individuals involved in order to enable them to address the problem of extortion.

Few of the extortion victims who were approached, some of whom now live abroad following their Cape Town experiences, were willing to talk, and those who agreed to insisted on their records being dealt with anonymously. Not only did they have valuable information about and perspectives on extortion, but they also had a keen interest to play a role in countering it. A key objective of this study is, after all, to influence policies and strategies of those authorities that are mandated to address extortion. The methodology adopted for this study was therefore geared towards obtaining credible information about the expanding extortion rackets in Cape Town, to develop a better understanding of what is happening, and to then channel that into the broader research objective of developing a strategic overall picture of recent developments, trends, impact, and actors involved, so that better policies and strategies can be formulated to address extortion.

A nighttime photograph of a busy street in Cape Town, South Africa. The image features a large, ornate, multi-story building with a balcony and decorative architectural elements. The building is illuminated with warm lights, and a sign on the balcony reads "CARNIVAL COURT". Below the balcony, there are shops and restaurants, including one with a sign that says "CARE". A red taxi is parked on the street in front of the building. A street sign for "LONG ST" is visible on the right side of the image. The title "EXTORTION IN CENTRAL CAPE TOWN" is overlaid in large, white, bold letters across the center of the image.

EXTORTION IN CENTRAL CAPE TOWN

Long Street, Cape Town, is at the heart of the city's nightlife entertainment industry, which has been targeted by extortion rackets. © DPA Picture Alliance/Alamy



Cape Town's city nightlife: The 'security' actors

Most large cities in the world contain areas in which nightlife entertainment thrives because of the concentration of bars, nightclubs, restaurants and other places of entertainment. In Cape Town, that area is situated in its central business district, roughly between Table Mountain and the port. Cape Town's entertainment economy caters for all types: there are restaurants for the fine diner, numerous bars, many of them popular with foreign tourists, and nightclubs and strip clubs for late-night revellers. The tourist spots and places of entertainment are also popular because they provide a relaxed non-racial, cosmopolitan environment, particularly enjoyed by young people.

Long Street, and the adjoining grid of streets and avenues, in central Cape Town, is one of the hubs in the Cape Town entertainment economy. It has been described as a party mecca and has a reputation as a bohemian hangout place lined with bookstores, bars, and various ethnic restaurants. This street is highlighted in this report because it has become as attractive to extortioners (and other criminals) as it has to tourists. It was inevitable that criminal networks would attach themselves to places of night-time entertainment because an industry involving alcohol, drugs and prostitution were waiting to be criminally exploited. Licit and illicit private security operators also became a feature of the nightlife industry in this part of central Cape Town. Private security companies supply bouncers and muscle-men to ensure the safety of patrons and staff. Some of these operators, however, were more than genuine security providers – they were closely linked to powerful criminal gangs from the Cape Flats or to leading underworld figures in Cape Town. For these security operators, providing security to protect staff and clients was not their real objective: their motive was to develop and exploit the criminal market by supplying, among others, drugs and prostitution, and through extortion. That is where the real money could be made.

In the late 1990s, the person who was regarded as the boss of Cape Town's nightclub 'security' was Cyril Beeka, a notorious figure with purported links to the police,¹² intelligence organizations and criminal gangs. Beeka was associated with the Hard Livings, one of the most powerful Cape gangs, with an extensive footprint on the Cape Flats,



The funeral of alleged underworld boss Cyril Beeka, Cape Town, 2011. © Nasief Manie/
Gallo Images/Foto 24

and linked to nightclub security extortion in the city.¹³ Beeka's hold over the extortion economy came to an abrupt end when he was gunned down in March 2011, and attempts were made by remaining bouncer and security groupws to merge their operations into one consolidated nightclub-security grouping.¹⁴ What happened is not clear but the initiative failed. The figure who later emerged as the strongman in the nightclub security scene was Mark Lifman, an astute businessman who – from his origins of owning taxis and a pie shop – would become a major property mogul.¹⁵ Lifman has had many brushes with the law, including charges of attempted murder, indecently assaulting boys and illegally operating an unregistered security company. In December 2020, he was arrested in connection with a murder (he is currently out on bail). He has consistently denied any involvement in criminal activities.

Lifman had been key to the formation of a new amalgamated security company, Specialized Security Services (SPS), in November 2011. It was agreed that restaurant and club owners would be informed that the security services being rendered to them would remain in place despite Beeka's death, and that only the name of the security company providing the services would change. A substantial number of clubs and establishments were linked to these security services. In January 2012, one of Lifman's close allies said in an interview that his company, SPS, was 'serving' 146 clubs, employing about 350 doormen who were trained in karate and jiu-jitsu.¹⁶ But rivalries and backstabbing among competing kingpins in the bouncer industry led to SPS being shut down in February 2012.

Following a spell of violence and assassinations in the Cape Town underworld, a lull ensued during which Lifman and his associates seemed to extend their grip on nightclub security in Cape Town. In June 2015, an event in Long Street caused a public outcry when a doorman at a popular bar, the Beerhouse, was stabbed to death. The doorman had been employed by the owner of Beerhouse and it was suspected that he had been killed because those running the establishment had refused to pay protection money.¹⁷ In this environment of assassinations of people allegedly linked to

underworld figures, gangs and nightclub security, Lifman's status as the strongman of the nightclub security economy continued to grow. Meanwhile, his image as a powerful, well-connected person was reinforced by a photo that appeared in a Sunday newspaper in April 2014 showing Lifman attending a birthday rally for former president Jacob Zuma in Cape Town.¹⁸

The so-called 'Lifman group' would remain the dominant force in the club security and bouncer market for a number of years. But in March 2017, a new rival and strongman emerged on the scene to challenge Lifman and his group. Nafiz Modack, an ambitious operator, together with his associates, contested the Lifman group for control over nightlife security arrangements. Like Lifman, Modack was suspected of links to powerful criminal gangs, he was ruthless and had experience in the nightclub bouncer business.

Modack's entry as a competitor punctured the relative peace in the nightclub industry. By 2018, the 'Modack group' and the 'Lifman group' were vying for control of nightclub and restaurant security.¹⁹ Modack set about taking over many of the security 'contracts' previously linked to the Lifman group and appeared to be gaining ground. Modack currently appears to have the upper hand but the scores between him and Lifman have not been settled and the rivalry continues.

Importantly, this violent competition for security contracts is reflected in the horrific experiences of those who were being extorted by these two rival groups. The following personal accounts provided by victims of extortion are examples of acts of extortion carried out in central Cape Town, providing stark insight into the experiences that individuals and their businesses have endured during 2020. The case studies have been selected to include several different types of businesses operating in the city's central business district, which, for the purpose of this study, also includes the suburbs of Green Point, Mouille Point, Sea Point and Camps Bay.



Mark Lifman, centre, leaves the Cape Town Magistrates' Court after being granted bail in connection with a murder, December 2020. © Adrian de Kock/Die Burger via Gallo Images

Extortion in action: The experience of four business owners

Restaurant and coffee bar

Marcus Oliver²⁰ came to Cape Town some ten years ago to open a restaurant and coffee bar in a busy part of the Atlantic seaboard suburbs. Prospects looked good: it was an area well frequented by locals as well as South African and international tourists. 'When I came to Cape Town, there was no indication or talk about extortion or protection monies that had to be paid,' said Oliver. 'I heard through the grapevine that there was money extorted in Cape Town, but we were never directly approached.'

Then, in 2019, while he was away on leave, there was a visit to the establishment. Two or three individuals entered in an intimidating way – one of them had a gun on him – offering security services. The figure that was mentioned was a payment of R20 000 – but that was negotiable. A staff member recognized one of the visitors as someone who used to work closely with Nafiz Modack. When the men learned that the owner of the establishment was not present, they left and there were no further visits for about a year.

Then, in late August 2020, after the severest lockdown restrictions in South Africa had been lifted, three men arrived in the morning wearing balaclavas. One of Oliver's bouncers recognized two of them, whom he described as Congolese. They offered Oliver 'backup security services'. They explained that they did not provide doormen, as some security agencies do, because that was not necessary with restaurants and coffee bars. They said that their 'security services' included providing help when, for example, a large group arrives and the establishment is overrun, threatening the security of patrons. Oliver explained that he had his own bouncers. The visitors then mentioned the name of their boss, Nafiz Modack; they

told Oliver that they worked for him. Oliver made it clear that he was not interested in their security services. When he asked who Modack was, they told Marcus to Google him and left. Although there had been no mention of the amount to be paid for the services, for Marcus it was an intimidating experience that made him feel very nervous.

A few days later, three men arrived again, this time the balaclavas replaced with COVID-19 face masks with the words 'Modack Group' printed on them. Oliver recognized one of the visitors as one of the three who had visited his restaurant a few days earlier. They asked Marcus whether he had considered their earlier proposal, to which Oliver replied: 'Yes, but I will turn it down. I don't need that.' They asked, 'So you are turning down our proposal?' Oliver said yes, upon which they got into their car and left.

Oliver said he felt 'shit scared'. He had never been approached in as threatening a manner as this and was now seriously concerned about the security of his restaurant, his patrons and staff. 'I have a kid at home, and your priorities shift and you think differently. But obviously I did not want to pay – in any case not somebody like them – an exorbitant amount of money.'

His concern was that Modack's men might return at any moment. Additional security was required and through contacts and acquaintances he got in touch with individuals who turned out to have links with Mark Lifman. But the difference between Modack's men and the ones he was now talking to, was that the latter were friendly and did not make any threats. They sat down with Marcus to jointly identify the security needs that had to be addressed. 'I asked them for help, and they offered it. There had been no pressure from

them. I obviously had to pay a fee, but it is far, far less, and that was voluntary. Since that day, I have never had problems again, I never had a visit again.'

The agreement that was negotiated provided, for example, for the supply of a doorman who would be able to identify those who were associated with Modack's group and prevent them from entering the premises. The concern Marcus had was that Modack's individuals might enter his restaurant, cause havoc, or leave without paying – all carefully staged for the purpose of creating a need for Modack's security

services. That was how Modack operated, according to rumours.

Asked whether the perception of extortion in Cape Town was such that it deterred potential investors in businesses such as restaurants or a coffee bars, Oliver said: 'There is probably a negative side of bringing it into the light. Although it has been there for years, it was always very limited to nightclubs and probably affiliated with the drug trade as well. The gangs have now shifted to other sources for money, such as restaurants, coffee shops and luxury apartments.'

Real estate development

Mario Ricardo²¹ came from Europe some years ago to invest in South Africa. He hails from a family with a well-established international investment and real estate business, with extensive interests in different countries. He had fallen in love with South Africa, and his group of companies decided to invest in real estate in Cape Town. Projects included a shopping centre, retail spaces and restaurants. But his flagship project was the renovation and refurbishment of a multi-storey building converted into luxury residential apartments. Central Cape Town, where the building was situated, would attract wealthy local and international buyers, reckoned Ricardo. At the height of his business, these various projects employed approximately 2 500 people. A South African bank had provided capital of approximately R700 million.

Before coming to South Africa, people had warned Ricardo that he was wasting his time investing in South Africa. But he was determined and never had any problems during the first few years. No one had approached him for protection money. But that changed in January 2020, two months before the first lockdown in South Africa, when he received an anonymous call and was told that he had to meet a certain Mr Modack. Ricardo explained that he did not know Modack and he did not want to meet him. The call ended. This was the first time that Ricardo had learnt of Modack, but later found out that he had

strong links to the underworld. For the rest of the month, he received continual calls, but after a while refused to answer them. One day, six or seven cars pulled up outside the building that his team were renovating; he occupied one of the luxury renovated apartments. The security staff who were guarding the building were shaken when the occupants of one of the cars got out and asked them: 'Do you know who we are?' Modack was there. Ricardo has it all on video. He was in his apartment upstairs and was kept informed of what was happening by his security guards. He passed on a message to Modack that he did not know him, there was no appointment, and that he did not want to meet him.

The message from Modack and his men was conveyed: they wanted a security contract. Ricardo explained that it would be the responsibility of the body corporate to deal with that. They had guns and insisted on meeting with him, and no one else. He was concerned. He instructed his security guards to tell the visitors to leave the premises. But Modack and his men waited for about 20 minutes before leaving. For Ricardo, the experience was very intimidating.

After that visit, he received continual calls from Modack's men. They would also arrive at the building and put pressure on the security personnel to reveal Ricardo's whereabouts. Modack's men started to harass staff at the building, including women, and they

were terrified. They would walk around the building, apparently looking for Ricardo. They kept one of their cars on the street outside, apparently to monitor his movements, and would pursue his staff, asking them where he was. He regarded it as intimidation of the worst kind. This was not an environment in which he was prepared to live or do business: 'When there are protection rackets, there is a problem. You can't do business.'²²

Ricardo made efforts to persuade the police and other authorities to assist and to address the threats and attempts to extort him – but to no avail. He spoke to WESGRO,²³ who could not assist. He spoke to Alderman J.P. Smith, the person in charge of security issues in the City of Cape Town, but was told that it was the mandate and responsibility of the national government to deal with organized crime and extortion, and that there was only so much that the Cape Town City Council could do. He and Smith even met with the Minister of Police to discuss the problem. But nothing came of that meeting either.

Ricardo's business was suffering. 'I probably lost about R150 million. I lost everything that I worked for. I thought, I am done dealing with this!'²⁴ He decided to

put his business up for sale and leave South Africa. At the end of March 2020, he packed up and left.

The broader damage to investment and development in Cape Town went wider than merely the losses made by Ricardo's business, one business investor in South Africa. He related the case of a wealthy person whom he knew: 'He was a very big guy who wanted to buy a unit from me. He was bringing a lot of business into South Africa. He moved with his whole family. He was going to invest about half a billion rands in South Africa. His family had rented a property for a year to try it, and then Mr Modack came and screwed up my sale. Now he is leaving South Africa. He told me, "Your case has been like an eye-opener for me. I don't want to repeat the same thing."'

The impact of extortion also has other, more difficult to compute, financial consequences and detrimental effects, including its impact on tourism. As Ricardo explained: 'I know at least 50 people who are our friends who used to come over every year from Europe to visit Cape Town. They are not coming any more because of this. Some of these people went to Greece or to Turkey instead. They would say, "What a pity – Cape Town is such a beautiful city." This is not good for the country.'

Snack and coffee bar

David Hendricks is one of the owners of a small snack and coffee bar in a busy central Cape Town street popular with locals and tourists.²⁵ One Saturday morning in August 2020, two well-built men walked into the place and asked for the owner or manager. Hendricks was called, and the two men explained that they were offering security services that they would like him to sign up for. He told them that it was a small business that did not need security services. One of the men asked for his phone number, to which Hendricks replied that he did not give his phone number to anyone. One of the visitors then handed him a telephone number and told him that it was the phone number of his boss. He mentioned who his boss was, and they then left.

Hendricks was shocked at what had happened. A customer, who happened to be present when the two men arrived, described the incident as a 'shakedown'. Nothing like this had ever occurred at his establishment or in the neighbourhood where he operated. To him, security rackets and extortion payments were associated with nightlife, with clubs and bars. He never thought that daytime establishments such as his would be targeted. After all, he had no need for security services. His place was closed during the night and did not need a doorman. Between August 2020, and the December 2020 interview with him, Hendricks was not again approached for security services.

Long Street – a case of double extortion

As mentioned, Long Street, in Central Cape Town, is the hub of the city's entertainment district. The coronavirus pandemic and the accompanying lockdowns dramatically dampened the number of visitors who frequent the area and exerted a severe impact on businesses. South Africa's prohibition on alcohol sales during the most stringent lockdown levels meant almost zero income for many establishments in the area.

When Randolph Jorberg opened the Beerhouse in Long Street in 2013, it was a bustling place.²⁶ At the time, extortion rackets and protection schemes were commonplace, and he was aware of them. He became well known in the Long Street area and familiar to those who follow the media. Some regard him as a controversial figure but others praise him for having the courage to speak out about extortion and for taking a stand against it.

A day after he opened the Beerhouse in August 2013, Jorberg had his first 'courtesy' visit from a 'big and strong person whose handshake one remembers'. He later found out that the visitor was linked to the so-called Lifman group. He was perfectly civil to Jorberg and subsequently paid two or three more friendly visits. At first, there was no pressure on Jorberg to pay for security services. But about a year later, the first unpleasant incident occurred. New visitors turned up, apparently representing the same group. Jorberg had not met them before but soon learned from others in Long Street that they were linked to the Lifman group.²⁷ One of them, Essack,²⁸ would be regularly in contact with the Beerhouse. They explained, and pushed, the services that they had to offer, including the provision of a doorman. Jorberg thanked them for their offer but explained that he had already hired his own doorman. He explained to Essack and his colleague that he trusted his doorman and that he could recruit his own additional staff for security at the Beerhouse. Jorberg said that he preferred to have the security staff on his own payroll rather than on someone's else's. Essack said, 'If you don't want to take this service, you could take our back-up service', as they described it. For that, they would charge a weekly fee of about R300 to R400. Jorberg took it that this was a rather low entry fee that would no doubt soon go up. He understood the 'back-up service' to relate to the Lifman-linked 'security company', which would provide a few guards or strongmen at short notice

on occasions when something unforeseen happened at the establishment and the regular doorman was incapable of dealing with it, such as an exceptionally large or rowdy group of persons. Although explained that he did not need their services, they kept on coming back.

During the interview with Jorberg, he said that it was ironic that, hitherto, during his seven years of trading at the Beerhouse, he had had no more than two visits by large groups that his own security staff had found too challenging to deal with. One of these incidents, involving a large group, had been in May 2015, shortly after Jorberg had turned down the offer of paying for the 'back-up service'. Essack was part of that large group. The inference that Jorberg drew was that they were trying to create a need for their services. The second incident had been more recently, in October 2020, involving a group of more than 200 teenagers who overwhelmed the Beerhouse. Jorberg phoned the Cape Town Central City Improvement District (CCID) offices for assistance, and they soon arrived and took control.

The relationship with the two representatives from the mysterious security organization would deteriorate dramatically. On 9 May 2015, Essack arrived with a group about ten others, whom Jorberg described as 'broad shouldered and intimidating'. They went up to the first floor, pretending to be customers. 'They caused an argument with a customer who was sitting at the bar minding his own business. The group pushed him, took his drink and then either smashed it to the floor or took it with them. They then came downstairs and left five or ten minutes later. On their way out, they assaulted the doorman, Joe, and took his walkie-talkie before disappearing.'

At that stage, Jorberg explained, almost all the businesses in Long Street were already paying protection fees to the group linked to Lifman: 'They were basically saying, "Yes of course we pay because everybody is paying."' Jorberg had, until then, challenged that acceptance. 'The people who came knocking on your door did not say, "I work for Modack", as they do today. It was more like, "We are coming and you should know us but we are not mentioning names."' None of these guys ever mentioned the name of Lifman. And they did not mention Modack at that stage.'

On 27 May 2015, Essack phoned Jorberg again to discuss providing a 'back-up service' for the Beerhouse. Jorberg had until then, consistently refused to take on any of their services or to make any payments. Essack said: 'We will protect you against group visits.' Jorberg told him that the only visit by groups that he had in about two years of trading had involved Essack and his group three weeks earlier.

On 15 June 2015, Jorberg and the Long Street community were shocked when Joe Kanyona, the doorman at the Beerhouse, was stabbed to death. For Jorberg, things had to change. Three days later, he and his management decided that they would start paying for the back-up services.

Jorberg cannot recall signing a contract but the name of the company that appeared on the receipt that Essack or his representative brought during his monthly visits when receiving payment from Jorberg, was GCL. From June 2015, Jorberg paid GCL R1 800 a month for the service.

Like so many others in central Cape Town, Jorberg had become a victim of extortion. The pressure increased and the intimidating environment in Long Street became more intense. One factor stoking this was that from about 2017 the competition for nightlife 'security' in central Cape Town between the aggressive and up-and-coming Modack group, and the until then dominant Lifman group became more intense. Relations between the two soured further when in March 2017, Modack and Lifman both attended an auction of Modack's property, which Lifman apparently bought.²⁹ Thereafter it became evident that the Modack group had swept through the areas in which the Lifman group had until then been the dominating force.

Jorberg was aware of this rivalry. 'During 2017,' he said, 'Modack arrived in town and took over all the doors in a sweep. He brought in ruffians and there were shootings and scuffles in town. But there was one area where none of those things were happening, and that was Long Street. Not one visit from Modack in Long Street happened.' The reason for the short-lived relative calm in Long Street was that Essack, who had been 'managing' Long Street for the Lifman group for the past few years, had, unbeknown to the businesses, quietly changed sides soon after Modack had started his bid for central Cape Town nightlife security. Essack had started to work for, or cooperate with, Modack. In business parlance,

Modack was busy with a hostile takeover, as opposed to attempting to gain dominance through partnerships, alliances and collaboration with competing groups.

Essack had been receiving Jorberg's monthly payments since his doorman's murder in 2015. Then, in December 2017, four men arrived at the Beerhouse on the instructions of someone Jorberg knew to be closely linked to the Lifman group. They instructed Jorberg to stop paying 'the old guys' (a reference to Essack). They provided the name and phone number of a new person whom Jorberg should pay. The payments to Essack and his associates had recently been crediting the Modack group because Essack had now crossed the floor. There would be stability only as long as the Lifman group did not react. Jorberg had continued paying Essack but it was now clear that the four visitors who had arrived were linked to Lifman and they intended to redirect the monthly extortion payments back to the Lifman group. As well as losing Essack, Lifman seemed to have generally lost a lot of ground to Modack in the battle for dominance in Long Street and central Cape Town.

But Essack meanwhile continued to visit the Beerhouse issuing invoices in the name of GCL, even though he had apparently switched sides to Modack. Jorberg was therefore now making monthly payments to the two rival groups. In early 2018, Essack continued to collect payments from Beerhouse, and Jorberg was getting more and more desperate. He spoke to a major landlord in central Cape Town and the advice he was given was to deal with a certain Tim. 'He managed our security for the last five years. We don't have drug issues. We don't have any issues with security and if we ever have something, Tim immediately sorts it out,' was the advice.

Jorberg was advised to work through a legitimate security company, Extreme Measures, to which Tim had links. For Jorberg, it sounded too good to be true. How could there be a security company that was not part of the two factions and that was powerful enough not to be intimidated by them? He contacted Tim (full name Tim Lotter). Lotter had become prominent in central Cape Town because he had taken on some major security contracts, including the Harbour House Group. Although Extreme Measures was apparently not part of the Lifman group, Lotter had at some stage interacted with Lifman about the provision of security for them.



Nafiz Modack (third from left) allegedly contested the Lifman group for control over Cape Town nightlife 'protection'. Modack, reportedly, has experience in the nightclub bouncer business. © Jaco Marais/Gallo Images

According to Jorberg, one reason why Lotter enjoyed the influence he did was that he could leverage his presidency of the Cape Town Chapter of the well-known Satudarah Motorcycle Club.³⁰

In Europe the Satudarah motorcycle club has a reputation for violence. As Lotter explained to him: 'By being a member of a motorcycle club, I now have back-up from Europe in case the shit ever hits the fan. Lifman and Modack know that if they ever harm me, they will have to deal with a real force coming in from Europe. One long-distance flight, and precision snipers are going to be in Cape Town. And they don't mess around. All South African gangsters are amateurs compared to them.'

Jorberg was now paying monthly security fees to Lotter as well. 'Basically, I was now in business with all three'. But, he said, 'There is only one of them I ever went into business with voluntarily, and that is Tim Lotter.'

On 4 January 2020, Tim Lotter was shot and killed. The media speculated that the murder might be 'linked to an underworld fight for control of nightclubs and drugs'.³¹

Jorberg's attempt to rely on 'trustworthy' insiders of the nightlife security industry in Cape Town had almost sucked him into the organized crime world linked to extortion fees and drugs. He then asked himself: how does one get out of this? He did what he could: he had tried to mobilize

Long Street business owners to be part of the Long Street Development Association to oppose the payment of extortion fees but failed. He tried to organize financial contributions from Long Street businesses to enable private security to protect them but this also failed because it was too costly. Like Mario Ricardo, he met with JP Smith, but the Cape Town official could not provide what businesses really needed, namely a security response that could address organized crime. And neither could Cape Town's metro police or the SAPS.

The CCID, the City of Cape Town and the police service had failed him (and businesses like his). Jorberg was receiving threats, including death threats; the lockdown was crippling his business. In August 2020, he left for a safer life in his home country, Germany.

A flurry of media reports during August and September 2020 about burgeoning extortion rackets in Cape Town no doubt contributed to the surprise visit to Cape Town by the Minister of Police on 16 September. Bheki Cele visited Long Street, including the Beerhouse. He appointed a special steering committee to clamp down on protection rackets. Hopes were raised that action would follow, but as far as the businesses and the public are concerned, nothing has changed. The steering committee has been forgotten and extortion in Central Cape Town continues.



EXTORTION IN KHAYELITSHA

Attacks on spaza shops run by foreign nationals, and robberies and looting became widespread in Khayelitsha over the years. © Ulrich Doering/Alamy



Prelude to a new wave of extortion – the Somali experience

In Khayelitsha, incidents of extortion have surged in ways that were not foreseen, with the result that residents now live in a state of anxiety, poverty and insecurity. Violence and intimidation are rife, and extortion is affecting all levels of society. Journalists and the police confirm that it is very difficult to obtain accurate information from Khayelitsha on matters relating to extortion. In short, people are scared to talk about it. A key challenge facing the Khayelitsha community, researchers and the police is therefore how to obtain solid facts and information about experiences relating to the extortion economy with a view to providing the evidence base that can inform ways of reversing this destructive trend.

Khayelitsha was not always a township in which gangs and extortion thrived. Foreign nationals fleeing their countries for a better future in South Africa, such as Somalis, Bangladeshis or Zimbabweans, first started working in Khayelitsha as hawkers or shopkeepers more than 15 years ago. Although Khayelitsha was known then to have significant levels of violence, a former Somali spaza shop owner recounted how things have changed dramatically since he arrived in Cape Town as a refugee in 2004: 'At that time, Cape Town and the townships were peaceful – much more so than now. We were able to walk through the whole townships, selling goods. That was in 2005. Today you can hardly drive there.'³²

Attacks on spaza shops run by foreign nationals and robberies and looting have become more prevalent over the years across Cape Town, including Khayelitsha. By 2007, the same spaza shop owner had been attacked and robbed of his stock on more than one occasion, but, as he said, 'there was no such a thing as extortion or protection monies'.

Intolerance of foreign residents increased, culminating in the May 2008 national wave of xenophobic violence seen in the looting of shops run by foreign nationals. A 2017 research report found that, 'No one seems to remember or know exactly what

happened or when, or by whom and where it started. The only thing most people seem to recall is that shops were looted chiefly by “thugs”.³³ The report referred to a collective memory ‘blackout’ by the community of the xenophobic attacks.

A Commission of Inquiry instituted by the Western Cape provincial government into policing in Khayelitsha in 2012, found that 96.5% of business robberies reported to the Khayelitsha police station related to robberies of spaza stores owned mainly by Somalis, although they made up only 50% of store owners. South African spaza shop traders accounted for only 3.5% of robberies. Moreover, 40% of business robberies also involved charges of murder or attempted murder.³⁴

During these years, and particularly since 2015, the gangsters and mobsters increasingly demanded protection money from foreign traders, which Somalis overwhelmingly refused to pay. Hundreds were killed during this period, mostly in their shops trying to defend themselves. Said one Somali activist: ‘The people who attacked us were locals who worked with the police – some of them. The police were mentoring them. We used to go to the police station to lay charges for the robberies.’ He explained that the police would not open a case.³⁵ These attacks were often launched by ‘skollies’ – unemployed, ruthless and undisciplined youngsters – who did so on behalf of older and more senior members of established criminal gangs.

2017: The year things changed

The year 2017 was a particularly bad one, and a turning point for Somali spaza shop owners in Khayelitsha and Cape Town townships generally. A Somali community leader, who had been monitoring attacks on foreign nationals for a number of years, described the fate of Somali shopkeepers in a media interview: ‘Somali nationals being targeted in business robberies is now considered normal and the deaths that follow have come to be expected. The Western Cape is the most dangerous place for Somalis to set up shop.’³⁶

Traders had managed to hold out against paying extortion fees since 2012 but at an unacceptably

heavy cost to life and limb, let alone assets and hard-earned income. The deadly attacks were on the increase. At least 37 spaza shop operators were killed during 2017 in Cape Town townships. One shop owner explained their fate: ‘Me and my friends used to confront it and try to stop them. We tried a lot of means, and sometimes got help from the law enforcement, local leaders, and sometimes from political leaders. But by 2017 we could not manage to stop them any more. It is in 2017 that this thing of extortion money started, especially in Site C.’³⁷

Police crime statistics do not provide disaggregated data on robberies of spaza shops or murders of foreign traders. Statistics for such incidents are merged with the statistics for the general population. However, there are some statistics that do broadly correlate with the assertions by Somali traders that attacks on their shops and killings of traders in Khayelitsha had reached intolerable levels by 2017 and that thereafter, following the ‘deal’ that they made with extortion gangs, the attacks decreased. The statistics do not confirm that the assertions made by Somali traders are correct, but they do show that the general trend of robberies at non-residential premises in Khayelitsha are in line with their assertions. Crime statistics published by the Western Cape Government show the following:

- During 2016 and 2017, the Khayelitsha police precinct recorded the highest number of robberies at non-residential premises in the Western Cape, namely 115. This was a 33.7% increase against the previous year, 2015/16.³⁸
- From 2017/18 to 2018/19, the Khayelitsha police precinct reported the largest decrease in the Western Cape in robberies at non-residential premises, namely a drop from 116 to 41, or a decrease of 64.7%.³⁹

Official government statistics about the deaths of Somali shopkeepers are hard to come by. Mere estimates without corroboration serve little purpose and are unlikely to have the necessary credibility to illustrate the gravity of the problem. The only credible statistics that could be obtained for this study, even though they were imperfect, were those provided by an undertaker who is responsible for the majority of burials of murdered Somali shopkeepers in the greater

Cape Town area.⁴⁰ He enjoys the support of the Somali community, who refer to him as 'Sheikh Nazir'.

The undertaker has copies of official death certificates and burial orders issued by the Department of Home Affairs for the 217 Somali traders he alone buried between 2012 and 2020, meaning that 217 is therefore the minimum number of killings of Somali traders over that period in Cape Town, as other undertakers were also burying Somali victims during that period.⁴¹

The victims had been killed in the Cape Town metropolitan area and each death certificate indicated the cause of death as 'unnatural'. The deceased had been killed in several areas, including Khayelitsha, Nyanga, Delft, Gugulethu, Strand, Kraaifontein, Parow, Philippi, Manenberg, Mfuleni and Mitchells Plain. The killings continued over eight years. Figure 1 illustrates the extent of the killings based on these death certificates.

The graph shows a spike in killings of shopkeepers between 2016 and 2017 followed by a subsequent significant drop in 2018 and 2019, with a slight increase again in 2020. These trends are in line with information provided by respondents interviewed for this study, namely that 2017 was a pivotal moment: Somali shopkeepers could no longer push back the

gangs and resist their demands for protection fees. They decided to enter into a deal with them to pay the fees in exchange for the promised protection. The risk had become too high; many were being killed. Attacks and killings thereafter tapered, but did not stop completely.

The first people who suggested talks with spaza shop owners about entering into a deal on extorted protection fees were a local leader and some taxi owners in Site C, Khayelitsha, in 2017. A Somali community leader explained this turning point in the response to extortion: 'They [the gangsters] told us, "Look, you can give us money per month, then you will never be killed and you will never be robbed. Anyone who robs you, we will apprehend them. The police will do nothing for you. So, are you going to agree or not?" That is how it came about.'⁴²

The response from the Somalis was, yes: that way their lives would be safe and the police, they realized, were not going to protect them. Another member of the Somali community recalled events as follows: 'There is this agreement between the thugs and the shopkeepers: "When we pay you [the extortioners], we can't be robbed. If we are robbed, you will have to bring back what was robbed."' Under this arrangement, if a shop was robbed and R4 000 was stolen,

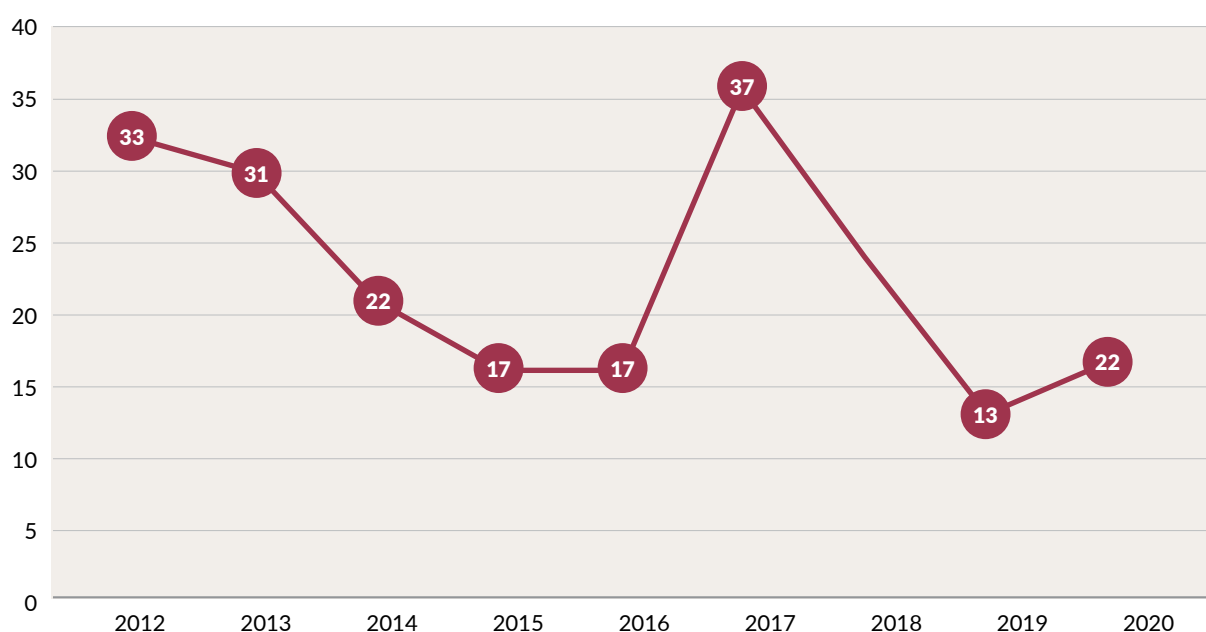


FIGURE 2: Somali shopkeepers killed in the Cape Town Metro area, 2012–2020.

NOTE: These figures are based on the records of one undertaker.

In Khayelitsha, incidents of extortion have surged in ways that were not foreseen.

the business owner would call the gangsters, who will be told that that sum of money had been stolen. 'The gangster will say, "OK, give us one day. We will sort his out. Your money is going to come back." They come back with the perpetrator and the money. Sometimes they will have beaten up someone who they bring along, full of bruises, and they say, "This is our territory, you can't do anything." Even small boys who steal are caught by the gangsters. They can't do anything. It is very peaceful.'⁴³

Another senior member of the Somali community observed: 'When the extortion started is when the killing slowed down. It has been far more peaceful since extortion payments have been made. If the Somali pays R1 000 per month, he knows that he won't be killed.'⁴⁴

Gangs must also have realized that this deal was a good option for them. It provided a regular flow of income and was a relatively low-risk way of making money. Reportedly, the deal that the extortioners and the Somalis had agreed on was a monthly fee of about R1 500.

The word about deals being brokered with the gangsters quickly spread among Somali traders and soon hundreds of Somali spaza shop owners in Khayelitsha and other townships were entering into similar arrangements with local gangs. Somali community leaders seemed to provide their reluctant nod to this – an exchange that since 2017 has ushered in a period of 'relative calm'. 'Now we are all paying and some of us are paying even double,'⁴⁵ a former Somali trader commented. 'Since we started paying, there has been low crime activity, but it is still happening.'⁴⁶ Another senior figure in the Somali community had a similar view: 'As regards Khayelitsha, it has been relatively calm since the spaza shop owners have started to pay monthly fees.' The arrangements or deals had improved the security situation for foreign shop owners.

Soon, Khayelitsha gangsters were successfully exporting the concept of an extortion deal to other townships where foreign nationals would be targeted for protection fees. A senior figure in the Somali community recounted:

The 'deal' in Khayelitsha was struck in 2017 or 2018. After it was successful, they moved further to Kraaifontein, where there was resistance but later on it became possible. They also went to Strand. There, three young Somalis were killed in one night because they refused to accept that extortion. Now I am hearing that they also accepted in Masiphumelele. The Khayelitsha gangsters went to the Eastern Cape and they signed in the Eastern Cape, but the Eastern Cape people are still resisting.⁴⁷

From these accounts, Khayelitsha was a hub from where the extortion rackets spread to other townships. According to the Somali activist, most of the extortionists were from Khayelitsha: 'Those from Khayelitsha are ruling the groups in other areas. They create the groups. The leaders from Khayelitsha come all over – to Du Noon, Joe Slovo Park in the Milnerton area, Kraaifontein. They also go to Paarl. They are all over. But their place is Khayelitsha. It is more than one group now.'⁴⁸

The reference to gangsters from Cape Town moving to the Eastern Cape should be investigated and taken seriously. The scope of this study does not allow for an examination into its veracity but a recent media report should sound alarm bells for the people of the Eastern Cape and for those responsible for law enforcement and governance. The



report claims that about 200 foreign spaza shop owners had shut their shops over the weekend of 13 February in Nelson Mandela Bay to protest at the shooting and killing of four Somalis. They had been robbed and killed in the townships of KwaNobuhle, New Brighton and Kwazakhele. These incidents are an eerie echo of developments in Khayelitsha during the years before 2017, pointing to a looming replication in the Eastern Cape of what had already been seen in Khayelitsha four years earlier.

A Somali community spokesperson from the Eastern Cape is reported to have responded to the spate of killings: 'We cannot live like hunted animals. We are killed and robbed every day because we are not prepared to pay the protection fee. The police fail to protect us and communities are also exploiting us. These thugs demand between R1,000 and R2,000 a month per shop. They are well known, but police are not doing anything about them.'⁴⁹

Little did the authorities or residents of Khayelitsha realize that the apparent arrangement between gangs and foreign shop owners would result in ominous consequences for their own safety and security after a year or two. A senior member of the Somali community summed it up as follows: 'The gangsters, when they secured the foreign nationals through payments, said, "OK, there is security for now, we are getting our money. Let's now start with South Africans."⁵⁰

These words would have accurately described developments in Khayelitsha during the years before 2017. Sadly, it also pointed to a looming replication in the Eastern Cape of what happened in Khayelitsha, where South Africans are likely to become the next extortion targets. What is becoming clear is that there are groups based in Khayelitsha

Foreign-owned businesses in the Cape Flats have been targeted by criminals for many years, but more recently there have been incidents of extortion also targeting South African citizens. © Edrea Cloete/Gallo Images

who have an interest in extracting monthly payments from Somali spaza shop owners in the Nelson Mandela Bay area. In 2020, hundreds of spaza shop owners in Nelson Mandela Bay received letters from an organization named Youth against Crime, asking for 'donations' of between R1 000 and R1 500 to protect shops against criminals. According to Youth against Crime, the group was established by ex-convicts, unemployed graduates and community members from Site C in Khayelitsha. The chairperson of Youth against Crime maintained that his organization was legitimate, while a police spokesperson described the letter campaign as extortion.⁵¹ This is what had happened in Khayelitsha between 2015 and 2017, except that the more recent letter campaign suggests a greater degree of sophistication than the extortion methods applied in Khayelitsha in the past. Either way, the development arguably indicates a looming repetition in the Eastern Cape of what happened in Khayelitsha. The warning lights should be flashing.

Extortionists turn their sights on South Africans

During 2019 and early 2020, very little was reported in the media about the growing extortion problem in Khayelitsha. But what did become known by observers was that, for the first time, gangs in Khayelitsha were extorting South African nationals on a wide scale, and no longer primarily targeting foreign nationals. This was a new development. A Somali with intimate knowledge of what happened in Khayelitsha said:

They now started approaching [South African] domestic workers. They spoke to them and said, 'We know that you earn between R2 000 and R3 000 a month. We want you to pay R200 per month.' They also started approaching those who own cars. They wanted to take money for each car. It became a problem and a public issue when South African citizens were approached – even though it has been existing for a long time for foreign nationals. Nobody cared about it and nobody did anything about it because it was not happening to South African citizens. When it happened to [South African] citizens, all of a sudden you now have government involved, everyone is involved and there is a steering committee.⁵²

A journalist explained what was happening on the street in the new wave of extortion unleashed on the South African community:

The people who are being targeted by different groups are ordinary people in the streets who sell fried meat, who sell clothes, chicken meat, etc. When I met them, we had to hide and go away from the public eye because they are very scared. They believe that these guys have connections to the police, they have connections in the cellphone network industry, where they think that their phone calls are being listened to. They think that whenever they discuss these issues among themselves, it eventually gets back to the gangsters.⁵³

Among the wider community, however, general ignorance about what was happening in Khayelitsha continued to prevail. Extortion cases in central Cape Town's night-life economy meanwhile made headlines and received attention. The Minister of Police visited central Cape Town on 16 September 2020 to familiarize himself with developments there. On the same day, he announced the appointment of a steering committee to crack down on protection money rackets in Cape Town. Extortion in

Khayelitsha was not mentioned, however – presumably because the minister had not been informed about what was happening there. That would soon change. In October 2020, the gravity of developments in Khayelitsha burst into the open through a flurry of media reports providing insight into the extortion environment in Khayelitsha.⁵⁴

A snapshot of some media reports from October to December 2020 provide an alarming picture of what was happening in Khayelitsha's extortion economy, and in particular how it was affecting local South African residents:

- 'Residents say that criminals used to target foreign shop owners. Now gangs are threatening individuals and businesses forcing them to pay extortion money or suffer the consequences.'⁵⁵
- 'They enter shops, hair salons, hardware shops, they even rob us small shop owners.'⁵⁶
- Extortion 'has become the latest crime wave in the townships'.⁵⁷
- 'People are too afraid to report these crimes to the police and no one from our community will protect you if a criminal is after you.'⁵⁸
- 'Gangs now identified as the Guptas and the Boko-Haram are said to be at the centre of extortion rings as well as shootings related to extortion in at least five major townships in Cape Town.'⁵⁹
- 'President of the Cape Chamber Janine Myburgh called for a stop to the growing extortion rings. "Should this slide into lawlessness continue, economic recovery [and] job creation will be severely hampered."⁶⁰
- 'The gangs – who have adopted monikers such as the Guptas and Boko Harams – demand "protection fees" from the traders. Crèche owners, carwashes, backroom-flat owners, the woman selling chicken trotters on the side of the road, hair salons, spaza shops and a myriad of other informal businesses are not spared. Those who do not comply are threatened with untold violence.'⁶¹
- 'Social media is awash with messages, allegedly from the gangs, informing communities that they now have to pay annual "protection fees" for their cars and businesses ... The message then stipulates the annual "protection fee" for various items. Car – 500 per annum, car wash – 500 per annum, barbershop – 500 per annum, saloon [sic] – 500 per annum ...'⁶²

Extortion was clearly being leveraged as a politicized issue as well: on 25 October, Deputy Minister of State Security Zizi Kodwa visited Khayelitsha, an ANC stronghold, to address a prayer meeting. He was seemingly following the example of leading figures in the Cape Town City Council and provincial government, who had shown more interest in extortion issues in the DA stronghold of central Cape Town.⁶³ In a media interview, Kodwa used conventional law-and-order rhetoric as he spoke about the criminality of protection fees, with no indication that he was aware of the underlying issues that would have to be addressed.⁶⁴ But, on the ground, the situation was much more complex and urgent than that.

Two gangs have reportedly emerged as prominent in Khayelitsha: Boko Haram and the Guptas.

The actors

Khayelitsha is a community that exists in a complex sociopolitical environment, with many competing gangs and groupings, as well as local organizations and lobbying interests. Rivalry, tension and conflict are therefore common in the community. Taxi operators and taxi associations play a critical role in townships and informal settlements as providers of mass transport, but also as pools and recruitment grounds of violence in their own right. Their prime interest is the profitability of their business, which they protect at almost all costs, with violence between rival taxi operators common and well documented.⁶⁵

Added to this conflictual and violent environment are youth gangs, many of whom become involved in violence, robberies and killings. Youth gangs are known to change their allegiances, attacking rival groups and sometimes splintering into new ones.⁶⁶ They have an uncertain, often short-lived existence, and are easy prey to larger, established gangs, who hire them to undertake specific tasks, such as raiding spaza shops on their behalf.

In this, gang-ridden environment, and one where criminal governance has to some extent replaced normative state-sanctioned law enforcement, who are the main actors behind the Khayelitsha wave of extortion? Two gangs that have reportedly emerged as most prominent in this criminal economy and territory, and that have recently caught the attention of the South African media, are Boko Haram and the Guptas (neither of whom have links to their namesakes, the extremist group in Nigeria or the infamous Gupta family linked to state capture in South Africa). They are both powerful gangs, their brutality instills fear and they both operate in Khayelitsha as well as other townships, although they have different profiles and structures.⁶⁷

A senior police officer, who knows Khayelitsha well, said:

The two main gangs who operate in Khayelitsha and surrounding townships are Boko Haram and the Guptas. They do not seem to have a clear structure or hierarchies. Since September 2020, there has been an upsurge in extortion, and also in the number of bodies that we pick up in the streets – probably linked to internal rivalries or fights between gangs. The Guptas are now more prominent with extortion rackets than Boko Haram. There is rivalry between Boko Haram and the Guptas. We pick up bodies in the streets in Khayelitsha with multiple gunshot wounds. We think that they are victims of internal gang rivalries and of rivalries between different gangs.⁶⁸

The brief profiles of Boko Haram and the Guptas that follow rely mainly on information provided by investigative journalists who have been tracking the two gangs for some years.⁶⁹

Boko Haram

Boko Haram is the more established of the two criminal groups, with links to important social, political and criminal networks. It is common among criminal organizations to select a name perceived to project status or strength, brutality and resolve, and the Boko Haram gang in the Western Cape creates fear: 'Everybody knows that there is a gang that is capable of making you disappear, and that is Boko Haram.'⁷⁰ It is also known that various groups by the name Boko Haram operate in other parts of the country.⁷¹

The Boko Haram gang in the Western Cape was originally part of a national criminal network that focused on cash-in-transit heists but is now an autonomous organization and no longer part of the broader group. One of the gang's leading and notorious figures, Ayanda Mtila, used to be a sniper for the taxi industry and had been involved in the taxi wars. He was shot and killed by security guards during a failed cash-in-transit-heist in October 2020. According to one source, Mtila's funeral was 'a spectacle'. Held at the Nyanga sports fields on 24 October, it was attended by hundreds of people. 'At the time of his death, Mtila was known as "president" in Khayelitsha. If your car was stolen, you [would] go to him and tell him that your car was stolen – he [would] get it back for you. The whole community knew exactly who this guy was. He was very dangerous, untouchable. In their area, he and others like him were the *de facto* law enforcers.'⁷²

At the time of Mtila's death, Boko Haram in the Western Cape was operating autonomously, and Mtila was regarded as the group's figurehead. Two other senior gang members, whose names are known, now apparently lead the group.⁷³ They own businesses, including construction and security companies, and are said to have very powerful connections, rubbing shoulders with 'the most well-connected people in the country'. Among their connections are politicians, policemen and Nigerian gangsters; they also have links with senior figures in the Cape Town underworld, such as individuals linked to the Modack and Lifman groups.

As is the case with other gangs and criminal groups (and licit businesses), the criminal markets that they focus on at any given time are those that enable them to sustain maximum sources of revenue from activities that involve minimal risk. For example, at one stage Boko Haram engaged in cash-in-transit heists because these provided a highly lucrative source of income. But as financial institutions improved security measures and the police succeeded in increasing enforcement, the cash-in-transit market became too risky. Add to that the shooting of Ayanda Mtila during a heist in October 2020, and it is understandable why Boko Haram transitioned to other markets, such as kidnapping for ransom and, more recently, extortion, which entail less risk.

As mentioned, according to Somali shopkeepers interviewed for this report, extortion rackets started to burgeon in Khayelitsha in 2017 or 2018. A journalist source confirmed this: 'A prominent businessperson in Khayelitsha told me extortion started about three years ago, but they mainly targeted foreign nationals.' From early 2020, that businessperson received more and more calls demanding payment. The callers said they were from Boko Haram, the Guptas, and other smaller gangs. 'There were six people that I spoke to, who all emphasized that it started with full force when the lockdown was relaxed for the first time. That is when the gangs came out in full force. The persons I spoke to thought that it was because the gangs had not been able to generate enough income during the hard lockdown and then there were no soft targets when they came out of lockdown.'⁷⁴

The Guptas

Anecdotally, the Guptas gang was started three or four years ago by a group of youths. In the township of Nyanga, some of them drove what are known in local parlance as 'cockroach' taxis.⁷⁵ The Gupta gang members would sometimes rob their passengers who were easy prey. They graduated to become involved in a range of criminal activities. In 2018, there were reports of 'cockroach' taxis being linked to robberies in Nyanga, Gugulethu and Philippi.⁷⁶


Alienated and unemployed township youths were attracted to the Guptas. Their image – a group of youngsters, exuberant and recklessness – had appeal. 'Their life is a constant song and dance, and they TikTok all the way. They get the girls, they have the guns, they flash the money.'⁷⁷ These young, ruthless and violent criminals seem to have 'matured' during 2019 and 2020, realizing that they could emulate large-scale extortion rackets that the Boko Haram gang had become involved in. Allegedly, they broke into the market that Boko Haram had dominated, namely, extortion of ordinary citizens. 'It was easy money.'⁷⁸ Interestingly, unlike gangs from other parts of the Cape Flats, they are less involved in the illicit drugs economy. If this is confirmed, then it is arguably likely to be a mere passing phase before the Guptas eventually become engaged in drugs as well.

The Guptas are alleged to be responsible for numerous killings, among them that of alleged rival members from the Boko Haram gang. There are suggestions that before his death, Mtila had kept the peace between the two gangs, but that seems to have been a very fragile truce. He may have managed the rivalry between the two gangs effectively during his lifetime, but things soon changed after his death in October 2020. According to an investigative journalist, 'Sources had alleged that Mtila, who wielded overwhelming influence as a township extortion boss, maintained peace between the Gupta gang from Lower Crossroads and the Boko Haram gang. After his death, however, the power balance was tipped, and the Guptas seized control through force.'⁷⁹

A grim example of alleged Gupta brutality shortly after Mtila's death was the alleged gunning down of seven people in a Gugulethu house on 2 November 2020. The incident was seen as part of 'a growing threat of marauding extortion gangs battling over territory in Cape Town's townships'.⁸⁰ According to a media report, the victims were allegedly Boko Haram members, and the murders are believed to be linked to rivalry with the Guptas, whose members were said to be 'behind the large-scale extortion of business owners across Cape Town. According to insiders, the Guptas are attempting to "wipe out" the Boko Haram gang in a winner-takes-all battle for control of extortion and drug territory.'⁸¹ In the meantime, the Boko Haram gang, while still involved in large-scale extortion rackets, was busy expanding its criminal activities into kidnapping for ransom.

According to journalist Aron Hyman: 'It seems that this grouping, that refers to itself as the Guptas, consists of violent young men from the Lower Crossroads and Philippi East areas, who get involved in robbery and extortion. They hang out together, they love sharing videos of themselves, they tote their firearms and they have a very short life span. For them, it is all about a flash, fast very dangerous lifestyle. They are trying to fashion themselves into a new rival grouping.'⁸²


It is a violent rivalry that can only result in increased violence in the communities where the gangs operate.

An aerial photograph of Cape Town's Atlantic seaboard, showing a dense urban area with various buildings, streets, and a coastline with waves. A white geometric graphic, consisting of several intersecting lines forming a star-like shape, is overlaid on the image. The text 'CASES OF EXTORTION OUTSIDE CENTRAL CAPE TOWN AND KHAYELITSHA' is written in large, bold, white capital letters across the center of the image.

CASES OF EXTORTION OUTSIDE CENTRAL CAPE TOWN AND KHAYELITSHA

Several businesses in Cape Town's Atlantic seaboard have spoken of incidents of extortion.

© Marco VDM



As mentioned, this study was able to cover in some detail only two areas of the metropolitan city of Cape Town, leaving the challenge of addressing remaining townships and suburbs to others to take forward. There is therefore a need for more research to help the public, decision-makers and civil servants to understand more broadly what is happening in the extortion economy and how best to respond to it.

This section briefly examines some of the forms of extortion that occur in parts of Cape Town other than Khayelitsha and central Cape Town, and in particular industry sectors. The purpose is to provide the reader with a brief indication of the scope and complexity of extortion in the Cape Town metropolitan area, as well as different forms of extortion that occur, and does not purport to provide a detailed analysis or findings. Not all examples that are listed are based on empirical findings and not all have been independently verified or confirmed. But the information comes from credible sources and provides an indication of how varied extortion is and how much work still needs to be done to obtain a better understanding of this problem.

There are various ways in which extortion can be assessed and studied. The approach adopted in the first sections of this report was to look at specific geographical areas and to then determine what the main forms of extortion are that occur in those areas, as well as some of the groups and gangs involved. This section focuses on the following:

- Extortion of business operators, including extortion at building sites
- Extortion linked to kidnapping, abduction and ransom money
- Extortion in the transport and taxi industry



Extortion of business operators, including incidents at building sites

Extortion of businesses has already been discussed in some detail in this report in relation to central Cape Town and in Khayelitsha. However, the practice is widespread and occurs in probably every suburb and township in the greater Cape Town area. The following examples and cases provide some illustrative examples of this.

Northern suburbs

The owner of a bar in Cape Town's northern suburbs catering for the late-night clientele confirmed that he had to pay protection fees for his bar to a senior figure closely linked to the Lifman group.⁸³ He said that the Lifman group has 'reached into the northern suburbs'. Conversely, however, a spokesperson for the Cape Chamber of Commerce and Industry commented that, although they do have members in that urban area, it had not had reports from its members in the northern suburbs regarding incidents of extortion.⁸⁴

Masiphumelele, Kraaifontein and Strand

A senior member of the Somali community described the spread of extortion rackets in some of greater Cape Town's townships as follows:

What I know is that they tried in many townships and that they were successful in Kraaifontein and also in Masiphumelele. Khayelitsha was the first. After it [extortion activity] was successful and a deal was struck, they moved further, to Kraaifontein. In Kraaifontein there was resistance, but later on it became possible. They also went to Strand, where three young Somalis were killed in one night because they refused to accept that extortion. And now I am hearing that they also accepted.⁸⁵

Stellenbosch, Du Noon, Joe Slovo Park and Paarl

Another senior member of the Somali community confirmed the involvement of 'gangsters from Khayelitsha' in extortion rackets elsewhere in the Cape peninsula:

Most of the guys who demand the money are from Khayelitsha. Those from Khayelitsha are ruling the groups in Stellenbosch and in other areas. They create the groups. The leaders from Khayelitsha then come to Du Noon, Joe Slovo Park, Kraaifontein and Paarl. They are all over. But their place is Khayelitsha. There is more than one group now in Khayelitsha, and they kill each other.⁸⁶

Sea Point and Camps Bay

A person who has been closely involved for many years in community issues in the Atlantic seaboard suburbs gave this perspective:

I was approached by three restaurants in Sea Point in about September 2020 – this was before Bheki Cele made the announcement about the Steering Committee [which was on 17 September]. They told me that they had been approached by individuals who said they provide security and that they wanted payment for that. A figure of R10 000 was given but I don't know whether that is monthly or weekly. They don't know who these people were but they assumed that they were part of Modack's group. People are scared to report these incidents to the police. Charl Kinnear used to be stationed at Sea Point. Since his murder, people are even more scared to report to the police. I have heard that there are also restaurants in Camps Bay that have been approached but I don't have the details. The restaurants are not sure what to do. They are standard restaurants, and not bars or clubs. The three restaurants refused to pay and have not paid until now.⁸⁷

The same source also provided the following information: 'I know of a local retail group which has about 20 stores and which is established in Khayelitsha where they were asked to pay [extortion fees]. I was surprised to hear that because I had not heard before that it happens in Khayelitsha. It is a clothing store.'

Extortion at building sites

In townships and in some suburbs, building sites have been targeted by extortion gangs. This and other forms of extortion seriously undermine business and development. The frustrations that many businesspeople share are apparent from a response to a survey conducted by the Cape Town Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Question 10 of the survey asks: 'Any other information you have available on extortion?' The response from one respondent was: 'It is happening everywhere in Cape Town, especially in the townships, where gangsterism and unemployment are rife. There's no will to deal with it and it makes it almost impossible to do business in our metro.'⁸⁸ Far more work is required to establish the full dimensions of this form of extortion.

The community activist from the Atlantic seaboard also referred to extortion occurring at building sites: 'Extortion takes place on building sites, and sometimes the community is involved and insists on payment because they say that not enough members from the community have been employed. In other cases, syndicates apply pressure and extort money for providing security.'

Extortion linked to kidnapping, abduction and ransom money

As is the case with extortion, kidnapping for ransom is one of those crimes that remain largely hidden from the public and the police. Kidnappers tend to threaten dire consequences, including death, if they are reported, and victims fear that the threats will be realized if they report their experience to the police. Violence is used, and entire families are intimidated and extorted of large sums of money.

One recent case of kidnapping for ransom is instructive. In October 2020, police arrested three suspects after two Chinese women were found in a shack in Gugulethu, one of them dead. They had apparently been snatched by the suspects in Delft a few days earlier, who were demanding R5 million from the family of the women for their safe return. The family could afford only R2 million.⁸⁹

Bellville has experienced a number of kidnappings for ransom over the past few years. A large community of Somalis live in central Bellville. They run cultural and community centres, mosques, and shops and other businesses. Shop owners in Bellville have not been successfully targeted for protection fees by gangs, partly because of a community patrolling system that was introduced, which appears to have been effective. A Somali community leader commented as follows: 'I have heard that the extortioners have tried to come to Bellville. They have made some contact but they were not successful.'⁹⁰

However, extortion related to kidnappings is something that some Somali businesspeople in Bellville have experienced. A kidnapping that occurred in Bellville at the beginning of 2020 illustrates the risk. A Somali businessman was kidnapped and his family paid a significant amount as ransom, and then vowed to retaliate. It was then discovered that some members from the Somali community had been involved in supplying information to the kidnappers. The member of the Somali community who had allegedly been involved was eventually killed in Bellville. A Somali community leader from Bellville related what he knew about the incident:

I knew the guy who was killed in the [centre] of Bellville. He was a Somali who was gunned down by other Somalis. They said he was part of the kidnappers, he gave them information and [told them] who the Somalis are who have money. They were saying that when they kidnapped a well-known Somali businessman and took him to the location with blindfolds on, the kidnappers gave the businessman all his own personal information. They [were able to tell] him his three names, his wife's names, children's names, where his business is, who is working for him, where he originally came from in Somalia.⁹¹

Then it became quiet in Bellville and there were no further kidnappings. But, according to the community leader, at the beginning of November 2020, there was another attempted kidnapping of a Somali:

There were guys in a minibus and they were parked somewhere around [the target's] house. When he came from work and [tried] to enter his house, they surrounded him and took him out of his car. They tried to push him into the minibus, but he resisted and shouted. People in the area heard and ran to the minibus and [the aggressors] ran away. The people told me that those who do the kidnapping, who physically take you away are black South Africans, and they speak Xhosa, most of them. But the Somalis who are involved will give them the information. The Somalis are very strongly against it. Even the Imams in the mosque have spoken against it. If Somalis are found being involved, they will either be killed or they will have to run away.⁹²

A senior member of the Somali community in Bellville also confirmed that kidnappings for ransom were taking place:

The gangsters are now also abducting our prominent leaders and businesspeople. They attack them and ask them for ransom. The guys are from Khayelitsha. All of these things that we are now experiencing are coming from the Khayelitsha and Nyanga areas, but those people who are abducting, are from Nyanga. They ask for a lot of money. They ask for millions. The last guy who survived it paid R500 000. Most kidnappings took place in 2019, around October, November and December. They abducted about three of our prominent business owners. Some of them have big businesses, like wholesalers, and it is the owners that they target. During 2018 and 2019, about ten guys from our community were abducted. There is an Ethiopian community and they also experienced abductions.

Extortion is widespread and occurs in probably every suburb and township in the greater Cape Town area.

They do the same thing that we are doing, and they do it in locations [townships] and in towns.

All those who were abducted survived. Unfortunately, there is also another issue. There is some sort of relationship: some members from our community, the wrong guys, are dealing with those guys, but they are hiding. I have survived [kidnapping] four times. We feel unsafe.

When it comes to kidnapping, there is always the involvement of the police. They get some of the money. There are some people who have been caught for that but I don't know one case where people have been arrested for it. The same thing happens in other communities – like Bangladeshis, Pakistanis, Indians and Ethiopians.⁹³

The number of kidnappings in the Belville area has subsequently declined since these accounts, as the senior member of the Somali community explained:

There is nothing happening now [i.e. November 2020]. But still, they are trying. Two nights ago, they tried on one of our guys, but he escaped. It was the third time that it happened to him. This thing needs awareness from the international community, NGOs, local government and government departments. This is not only affecting the Somali community: it is now jumping to the locals and some of them get killed. They did not use to do that. It is worse than they thought [i.e. extortion, robberies, murders and kidnappings]. When these things started up, we met with the police and explained to them what was happening. But the police did too little. They did not work with us. We tried to report the cases, and some of the cases also have been exposed to the gangsters by the police. The gangster will come to you with a copy of information of yours from a police file and say that you went to report us. Now everyone is too scared to report.⁹⁴

Extortion in the transport and taxi industry

One of the strategic goals of the Western Cape Department of Transport and Public Works is to lead and promote the development and implementation of an integrated transport system in the Western Cape.⁹⁵ Such an integrated system becomes almost impossible to implement when taxi operators and criminal groups increasingly appropriate the transport space for themselves and even develop their own rules and standards, deploying their own staff to police it. The entire transport environment is undermined by such behaviour. Vehicles are stopped at illegal roadblocks and the drivers forced to pay a fee, while some vehicles users are pressured into paying protection fees against the threat that their vehicles will be 'impounded' and released only once a hefty fee has been paid to extortioners.

These are common experiences. They are reflected in the responses from Cape Town businesses to the survey conducted by the Cape Town Chamber of Commerce and Industries. Question 1 was: 'What type of crime has your business been directly exposed to in the past 12 months?' A response relating to Khayelitsha from a respondent is as follows: 'Codeta "permit" for company staff transport R1 500 Site C rank.' Other responses include 'Extortion of staff transporters' and 'I paid the amount required by Codeta to keep my staff safe.'



A recent incident illustrates why Site C in Khayelitsha is regarded as a hotspot for transport extortion. During the first week of March 2021 at the Site C taxi rank, an attempt was made to extort a company staff transport vehicle for R1 500 by what appeared to be CODETA members.⁹⁶ The vehicle was apprehended near site C and then forced to drive to the taxi rank, where it was detained awaiting payment. When the money was not forthcoming, the driver was threatened and warned to return later with the money.

The employer was furious when he heard about this incident but laid no charges at a police station out of concern that his staff might be required to give evidence and could therefore face threats of violence. When the driver returned to Khayelitsha the following day with the required R1 500, he was told that there was no need to pay. Instead, he received a warning that the vehicle would be impounded if it were found in Khayelitsha again. He was warned that he would then have to pay R5 000 as a 'release fee' to get it back. The threat contained the implication that the company transport vehicle should no longer pick up its employees in Khayelitsha and that taxis should be used instead. The employer was left with no option but to thereafter collect and drop off his frightened employees outside Khayelitsha.

Extortion rackets and the scores of taxi-related murders that have occurred since late 2020 undermine the public transport system. The majority of incidents happen on certain routes and at specific taxi ranks. Large sums of money are extracted for access to certain routes. Taxi associations play a big role in the control of these lucrative routes, where access to the most expensive ones can cost many thousands of rands. Far more work needs to be undertaken on extortion in the transport industry for a better understanding of what is happening and its impact not only on transport in the Western Cape, but on the economy in the region as a whole. The provincial government is of the view that the damage is substantial.

Certain taxi ranks in Cape Town have become hotspots for extortion.


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ASSESSING THE EXTORTION SURGE

Many factors contributed to the expanding extortion economy across Cape Town since 2020.

© Quaid Lagan/Unsplash



Central Cape Town and Khayelitsha are so different that it is more instructive to assess extortion in those two areas separately. Central Cape Town is home to top financial institutions, hotels, the South African Parliament, shopping areas, restaurants, coffee bars and nightlife attractions. It is a wealthy and long-established central city area. In contrast, the establishment of Khayelitsha was announced by the government as recently as 1983 and it is now the largest township in Cape Town, with an estimated 2021 population of 447 120.⁹⁷

Khayelitsha has been described as a 'partly informal township'. The massive influx of migrant job seekers from the Eastern Cape has contributed to the rapid expansion of large, underdeveloped shack areas that now form part of Khayelitsha, in which poverty and unemployment are prevalent, and where many residents live in cramped, temporary structures. Other parts of Khayelitsha strive towards a more a middle-class appearance, with shopping malls, proper residential structures and a range of amenities. The population in Khayelitsha is overwhelmingly black. While the central Cape Town population mix has changed, the majority of those living and working there continue to be white.

Extortion in Central Cape Town: Contributing factors

Central Cape Town has been subjected to extortion rackets by criminal elements for decades, particularly in those parts where the nightlife and entertainment industry is located. Criminal networks have vied fiercely for this illicit business, and the competition is characterized by intimidation, violence and killings. Media reports during 2020 reported on expanding extortion rackets in Central Cape Town, although the problem had not reached the crisis proportions that some were describing. Three main factors contributed to the 2020 surge in extortion.

The first (and these are not listed in order of importance) would be the aggressive expansion and takeover bid by groups, in particular the so-called Modack group, from 2018 onward. This group introduced new intimidating practices around soliciting protection fees that caused both fear among the public and nervousness in the business community. Extortion gangs that extracted protection fees in the past were probably as criminal in their intent as today's are. But, in the past, the approach of the extortioners seems to have been more subtle or at least less openly aggressive than appears to be the case today. It would not be surprising if this more aggressive approach is deliberate, and used to 'soften the market', i.e. to heighten levels of fear and intimidation, thereby increase submissiveness and compliance of businesses when they are approached for protection fees. The drive by extortion gangs to add establishments not previously targeted, such as restaurants and coffee shops frequented by a daytime clientele, and the open carrying of arms by groups of strongmen who arrive in numbers and generally conduct themselves like gangsters in movies, are indicative of this more aggressive approach.

The second explanation for the fast-expanding extortion rackets in central Cape Town during the past year has to do with the lockdowns and curfews imposed by government as a result of the pandemic. For the extortioners, revenues from establishments serving alcohol and food dried up almost completely for about five months, from March to August 2020, and then again for a while from the end of December 2020.⁹⁸ Once the lockdown was partially lifted from the middle of August 2020, and venues could reopen and operate again, albeit on a scaled-back basis, the extortion groups were quick to use the newly opened space to aggressively make up for what they had lost during the lockdown period by reinstating extortion payments that had lapsed and by attempting to expand their market through pressuring additional businesses into paying.

The third factor that contributed to the 2020 surge in extortion in central Cape Town relates to ineffective policing. A common thread that ran through most interviews that were conducted as part of this study was people's disappointment and sometimes

anger at the inability of the police to address extortion rackets in central Cape Town in an effective and meaningful way. Trust in the police is low and a big question mark hangs over its competence in the public consciousness. Reactions from interviewees testify to this. According to a community activist from the Atlantic seaboard suburbs, people 'are scared to report these incidents to the police. Charl Kinnear used to be stationed at Sea Point. Since his murder, people are even more scared to report to the police.'⁹⁹

There is widespread lack of trust and confidence in the police among those who operate businesses in central Cape Town. Most of them see no option but to give in to the extortion demands because reporting the matter to the police is too risky for them and serves no purpose. As one restaurant owner in central Cape Town commented: 'It is an open secret that there are cops on the payroll of Modack. I don't know whether they pay them money or grant them favours.'¹⁰⁰

Those who until recently seem to have been able to resist paying protection fees are mainly small daytime businesses where no liquor is served and where it is difficult to justify stationing security personnel at the establishment. But such businesses, who may have received only one relatively harmless visit by an extortion gang attempting to solicit monthly 'security' payments, find such experiences traumatic. The owner may have declined to pay or enter into an arrangement with the extortionists, but even then, the very presence of the extortionist heralds a new period of vulnerability and anxiety because of the risk of a follow-up visit from the gang.

Central Cape Town's extortion market is a relatively settled and conventional one, in that it is typical of a developed and sophisticated port city anywhere in the world in which there are numerous nightlife attractions, and local and international tourist venues. Cape Town's attraction as a tourist centre has ensured that the nightlife and hospitality industry in the city has generally done well and enabled businesses to thrive. But when law enforcement is ineffective, criminal extortion networks enter and establish a foothold from which it becomes difficult to dislodge them. They try to brand themselves as

security companies, but many of them are in reality organized crime groups pursuing multiple illicit activities. Extortion rackets are often the defining activity of such organized crime groups.

It is also common for ambitious organized crime groups across the world to seek legitimacy and build patronage networks by dishing out largesse among the local community, which enables them to display a human side and to build admiration and support. This can turn recipients into sympathizers or supporters of the extortion boss, effectively a form of criminal philanthropy, also described as 'gangster philanthropy'. A recent case in Long Street may fit into this category of dubious philanthropy: in September 2020, Modack paid a well-publicized visit to the Beerhouse in Long Street, Central Cape Town (the site of one of the earlier case studies above). An

entourage of Modack associates arrived at night to distribute free food parcels outside of the Beerhouse bar. When Modack arrived, surrounded by his security staff and onlookers, he went into the Beerhouse, apparently to ask the staff whether it was in order for him to distribute the food parcels at the door. In a YouTube video clip, Modack explains his presence at the Beerhouse.¹⁰¹

This kind of conduct by Modack does more than merely illustrate his confidence. It also signifies that he regards himself as having a stake in the territory and that the state does not have the monopoly of influence or authority there. But it shows a degree of nerve that could become his undoing – but only if the police, together with the business owners, re-energize their efforts to bring to book those behind the extortion rackets.

Extortion in Khayelitsha: Contributing factors

Khayelitsha experienced a significant surge in extortion and related crimes from 2018/2019 onward. While poverty and unemployment – endemic in this area – can be contributory factors to crime, they cannot be described as causes of extortion. Four main factors can be identified as having contributed to the burgeoning extortion rackets in Khayelitsha.

The first relates to the so-called deal entered into from around 2017 between Somali spaza shop owners in Khayelitsha and various local extortion gangs. Levels of brazen intimidation, robbery and killing of foreign nationals had reached a peak in 2017, when the Somali traders in Khayelitsha and elsewhere capitulated and entered into widespread arrangements with extortion gangs to pay regular 'protection fees' in exchange for a degree of security. Then, from about 2018, gangs in Khayelitsha and elsewhere, including the two most powerful and ruthless groups, Boko Haram and the Guptas, shifted their focus from overwhelmingly targeting low-risk foreign traders, to also include vulnerable South African residents. This marked a new development, a shift in the extortionists' *modus operandi*. A comment made by a researcher with intimate knowledge of Somali migrants sounds ominous but is apt: 'One lesson could be that if you overlook crime that

is committed against foreigners, it could eventually come back to haunt broader society because it might in time envelop and affect South Africans as well.'¹⁰²

The gangs must have assumed that targeting South African citizens would enable them to tap into a massive and unexploited extortion market, and that it would be a relatively low-risk activity with easy money, just as their extortion rackets on foreign nationals had turned out to be. But they were wrong. Soon, the reaction from South African residents gathered momentum and mounted into widespread fury about the attacks on 'our' people. But the gangs were all-powerful, and an environment of fear and intimidation had already been created, resulting in Khayelitsha residents fearing to vent their anger and anxiety publicly. To the uninformed outside observer, everything in Khayelitsha appeared to be relatively quiet and normal. But it slowly became apparent, as the media stepped up its reporting on what was happening there, that a crisis had developed. The general public of Cape Town slowly became aware of the fear and terror that was common in Khayelitsha and other townships. Maybe the quiet anger of residents is a factor that can be channelled and manipulated for better or for worse by local leaders, the state, or the gangs to suit their own objectives. As things

'We are not sure who the suspects are because they are not being reported to us.'

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stand currently, the gangs are more likely to exploit and use this anger to their benefit as they have established a momentum, while the state no longer seems to have much influence or interest in what happens in some areas of Khayelitsha.

The second factor is the COVID-19 pandemic. As happened in central Cape Town, the lockdowns restricted extortion rackets in Khayelitsha for a while, but with the partial relaxation of the regulations in August 2020 came a renewed surge in extortion activities. At the start of the lockdown, shops and taverns had been forced to close and curfews were imposed, causing a major drop in revenue for extortion gangs. This contributed to them becoming more aggressive and ruthless in their approaches than they would normally have been once the restrictions were partially relaxed. They then, in addition to extorting monthly protection fees from foreign shop owners, also targeted citizens for protection fees. The misery and suffering of Khayelitsha residents became worse than had been imagined.

A third factor that contributed to the expansion of extortion rackets in Khayelitsha was the increasing violent rivalry between the two main gangs, Boko Haram and the Guptas. The Guptas, seen as the 'upstarts', were expanding rapidly and competing ruthlessly with Boko Haram by muscling in on the extortion market.¹⁰³ The active expansion of Boko Haram's extortion activities into other Cape Town townships is likely to provide an example for the Guptas to follow. Extortion is a relatively low-risk and lucrative form of criminal activity, and if it does spread to other urban areas, the lawlessness, violence, lack of development and misery in other townships is likely to intensify. This rivalry between criminal groups, involving, among others, the assassination of rivals, is already occurring in townships such as Gugulethu and Philippi. These townships are likely to follow Khayelitsha's example and become enveloped by despair, unless extortion gangs are countered effectively by law enforcement.

The fourth factor that has contributed to the wave of extortion in Khayelitsha is lack of effective policing, including a failure to detect, and properly investigate, extortion cases for submission to prosecution authorities. A key reason for the ineffective policing is the lack of trust in the police and the refusal by Khayelitsha residents to report cases of extortion to them. It is obvious that without cases being reported to the police, they will not be investigated or addressed by the criminal-justice system. Impunity is the result. A police officer, who is well informed about Khayelitsha, explained the dilemma that police there face: cases of extortion are not being reported to them, and their crime statistics do not reflect the reality on the ground. 'We are concerned because our case numbers are not in line with what we see on social media. Far more cases of extortion are mentioned and described on social media than are reported to the police. Incidents of extortion mentioned on the social media do not carry through onto our dockets.'¹⁰⁴

This is an acknowledgement that the relationship between the community and the police is seriously damaged, and requires urgent attention, not only by the police, but by all stakeholders who have an interest in restoring proper policing to Khayelitsha. The same police officer also expressed the view that business robberies during the year ending in March 2021 are likely to decline, probably, he said, 'because gangs were being paid protection monies. But we are not sure who the suspects are because they are not being reported to us.'


The failure by the police to detect and properly investigate extortion cases is only partly due to poor community–police relations and lack of reporting. It is also significantly influenced by what appears to be weak crime intelligence on the part of those police officers who are expected to investigate extortion cases. Extortion tends to be linked to organized crime, and a successful investigation of organized crime is highly dependent on crime intelligence. Sophisticated systems, technology and well-trained investigators are required. The lack of successful prosecutions of cases in Khayelitsha suggests that these are absent there. If it had been possible to interview police officers for this study, this proposition could have been tested against versions provided by the police in order to jointly search for solutions to the current problem. In the absence of an explanation from the police, however, the study had to rely on comments and opinions from persons who are well informed about developments in Khayelitsha. One example is the response by a Cape Town business to a request in the survey conducted by the Cape Town Chamber of Commerce and Industry for additional information on extortion: ‘Organized syndicate groups terrorizing businesses with police fully aware but intelligence gathering very very poor to end the practice.’

However, one perspective from an investigative journalist who is well informed about Khayelitsha, places a more nuanced interpretation on the general view that the police lack crime intelligence: ‘My sense is not that intelligence is lacking by the police. I think that there is a problem when it comes to detective work and prosecution. The problem is more at the station level. That is why extortion is so prominent in places where police stations are under-serviced, i.e. struggling police stations, such as Philippi East, Nyanga, Khayelitsha, Lingeletu West.’ He also said, ‘It sounds as though the police are trying to clamp down on police involvement in extortion. This is one of the key issues hampering extortion investigations.’¹⁰⁵



CONCLUSION: PUSHING THE STATE ASIDE

In certain areas, like Khayelitsha, shown here, where extortion has become rife, criminal governance has often displaced state institutions. © Roger Bosch/AFP via Getty Images



Just before this report was published, three police officers were arrested on 8 April 2021 for alleged links to extortion in the Western Cape. Addressing the media briefing that followed the arrests, Police Minister Cele said that the SAPS knew of the police officers who were linked to the alleged crimes and that some police officers were being ‘investigated and arrested for extortion in and around Cape Town’. According to the provincial police spokesperson, Brigadier Novela Potelwa, an officer responsible for protecting an unnamed deputy minister was among the three. A total of 106 people linked to extortion cases in Cape Town have been arrested and charged this year since members of the community and business owners raised the alarm, said Cele.¹⁰⁶

This is positive news in terms of SAPS endeavours to crack down on extortion, and the recent arrests raise some hope that the police are beginning to take the threat of extortion rackets seriously, while acknowledging that this form of crime is on the rise and damaging to many sectors of industry. Effective policing in the province is a prerequisite for countering extortion. However, the erosion of legitimacy and loss of trust in law enforcement goes much further than merely the police. In many areas of Cape Town, people have lost trust in the state itself – in government institutions and structures, including provincial and local spheres of government. Restoring broken community police relationships and encouraging the public to report extortion cases becomes an even more challenging task when confidence in the state as a whole is low. A journalist who has followed developments in Khayelitsha closely for a number of years commented: ‘There is low accountability and low government footprint in the area where extortion is taking place.’¹⁰⁷

Observations such as this point to loss of state legitimacy in areas in which extortion is rife. Such areas certainly exist in Khayelitsha, for example Section C, but it was not within the scope of this study to scan the whole of Khayelitsha to identify the areas in which state authority and legitimacy has declined and those in which a degree of ‘normality’ still exists. It is therefore not possible to suggest that state authority in all parts of Khayelitsha has declined or disappeared, without undertaking further detailed studies to assess the facts on the ground. What can be said, however, is that there are



Police Minister Bheki Cele inspects SAPS officers deployed to the Western Cape in April 2021. But will the latest intervention have the effect of sustainably cracking down on the networks behind extortion in the city? © Brenton Geach/Gallo Images

parts of Khayelitsha in which the state and some of its institutions have been pushed aside by powerful criminal networks and where criminal governance has filled the gap.

The alienation between citizens and state is particularly prevalent among the youth. Massive unemployment has led to hopelessness in communities like Khayelitsha, with prospects of getting a job declining rather than improving. Criminal youth gangs, such as the Gupthas, have grown and gained power and sowed fear. They reflect a youth that thrives on social media, that lives for now, and that, where possible, opts for a fast, flashy and dangerous lifestyle. They seem to shun conventional politics and political parties.

But others in the community are also adrift due to the lack of any clear authority that inspires confidence. The description provided earlier in the report of the influence of Mtila, former leader of the Boko Haram gang who was killed in October 2020, and referred to in Khayelitsha as 'president', illustrates the contestation for power by an organized crime boss at the expense of state authorities. Mtila was filling a void. This development is in line with international experience, which has found that where a legitimate authority withdraws or is pushed aside, other powerful actors, frequently sustained through criminal activities, will step in and fill the void. This development has repeated itself throughout history. It has the ring of the period in the Middle Ages when robber barons ruled the day in parts of Europe. During the period of the Holy Roman Empire, when the emperor's power weakened, robber barons would step in to fill the power vacuum with their own authority to collect tolls without the emperor's approval. They resorted to kidnapping, the interception and capturing of ships, and with their illicit funds consolidated their power base by, for example, building castles. They consolidated their presence through crime and power until the legitimate authority of the emperor, nobles, or bishops could re-establish their presence. Khayelitsha is a far cry from medieval Europe, but is a similar phenomenon occurring there?

It is extortion that has been a key contributing factor to the erosion of social confidence in the state and its institutions, including law enforcement. Organized crime groups are introducing their own forms of governance and 'taxation'. The unlawful extortion tax that extortionists levy goes straight into the pockets of gang bosses at the expense of an impoverished community. It is a parallel form of taxation. Residents are paying extortion tax for nothing in return, while the protection that the state is supposed to provide in return for collecting regular taxes through SARS is no longer available. As a result, insecurity has increased and state services are reduced.

If in Section C, taxi owners can impose their own transport rules – such as impounding private vehicles entering Khayelitsha in exchange for a hefty release fee – in order to force residents to use taxis rather than the free transport offered by their employers, then the retreat of state power is evident.

What is therefore happening in Khayelitsha is that there are areas in which a form of state formation is taking place, driven and shaped by powerful crime bosses. No longer can the state assume that if a government minister visits the area to address a public meeting there will be enthusiastic support. The relatively poor attendance of the public meeting addressed by Deputy Minister of State Security Zizi Kodwa in September 2020 may have been due to fear or because of an alienation that exists, but it is a sign of the times.

The following statement, from a handbook on responses to extortion, could have been written with Khayelitsha in mind, yet the book is based on international experience and the result of a global study:

The deployment of extortion is a systemic practice that thwarts the capacity of the state to govern and protect a community. Criminal governance usually grows amid distrust of state institutions, or where state presence is weak. The inability of individuals or communities to resist extortion then feeds violence and further hampers the state's presence, and people caught in such an environment live in constant fear. It is a perpetuating cycle. Armed groups and criminal organizations are vigilant in protecting the source of their funds, and quick to enact retribution against those who do not cooperate. The financial incentive, coupled with the threat of violence, often coerces government or state officials to turn a blind eye, or become complicit in the extortion economy.¹⁰⁸

An important question to ask is whether the extortion economies in central Cape Town and Khayelitsha have already become entrenched and, perhaps even worse, normalized. A more detailed study would be required to provide a conclusive answer to this question. The extent to which extortion has become entrenched is key when devising countermeasures. It stands to reason that once it has become entrenched, there is only little room for manoeuvre by the state and other role players if responses are to be effective. An entrenched extortion market tends to be one in which members of the police are linked to extortion rackets, where the general population lives in fear of the crime networks and where the population has largely lost faith in the state, including SAPS. That seems to be the case in parts of Khayelitsha. Where members of the police profit from their involvement in extortion, it is not in their own interest to assist in dislodging extortion networks and they are likely to be obstacles in attempts to counter extortion measures rather than drive them.

'Criminal governance usually grows amid distrust of state institutions, or where state presence is weak.'

Where extortion is present but not yet entrenched, or entrenched in some areas of the community only, the possibility of successful interventions against extortion are greater. This would be an extortion economy in which there is ongoing rivalry for dominance between some powerful extortion groups, where alliances constantly shift, where some members of the police have links to extortion gangs but where police still enjoy a degree of trust and legitimacy in the general population. State power and state legitimacy therefore remain in place, at least in significant sectors of the community.

Central Cape Town is an area in which extortion is present and even getting worse, but where it has become entrenched only in the nightclub and nightlife areas, including Long Street, but not in the general business areas or among the residents of the area. The state, including the city council and the province, continue to have a presence and a broad measure of control and legitimacy in the major portion of central Cape Town. But these state entities have all been unable to eradicate extortion from those areas for many years. The much larger financial, retail and hospitality sectors have not been affected, even though in recent times extortion gangs have started to expand into new markets, such as ordinary restaurants. The thousands of residents who reside in the city bowl, Green Point, or Sea Point have not yet been targeted.

Central Cape Town is therefore an example of an area in which 'sector extortion' takes place, whereas in some Khayelitsha areas a form of 'popular extortion' has taken over and the population in those areas live in trepidation of criminals. Entire communities are affected in such areas. In central Cape Town, a counter-extortion response could be effective if it is part of an integrated and strategic response driven by central government, with local government as well as community involvement. This option should be explored for the central Cape Town area.

As regards Khayelitsha, however, the situation is far more complex. It would seem that gangs and criminal networks are already entrenched to some significant degree and are currently entrenching themselves further, far more so than in central Cape Town. There, a form of popular extortion is widespread. That is not the case in central Cape Town or the Atlantic seaboard suburbs. In Khayelitsha, residents in some areas seem to have given up hope that anything can or will be done to alleviate their plight. To address the developing crisis in Khayelitsha is therefore more complex and will require the involvement of multiple role players, including representatives of Khayelitsha's residents.



Effective policing is key to ending criminal governance systems that perpetuate extortion.

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Recommendations

Five recommendations are offered to address extortion in central Cape Town and Khayelitsha. By lifting the veil on extortion, a good deal of information has become available. But more detailed and in-depth research will be required to formulate more specific recommendations.

1. Restore effective policing and enhance crime intelligence.

This recommendation is as obvious as night follows day. But the sad position, where police management at national as well as provincial levels is riddled by factions and internal contests, makes it necessary to highlight police effectiveness. While writing this report, the media have reported that the Minister of Police had sent a letter to the president requesting the removal of the National Commissioner from his post.¹⁰⁹ Police management is in turmoil. And, even worse for extortion-ridden Khayelitsha and central Cape Town, the SAPS crime intelligence components at national and provincial levels are in a state of flux, with the former head of Crime Intelligence being under fire and with controversial new appointments being made. There is no stability in law enforcement and it is a widely held view that crime intelligence is in disarray. A massive task awaits the new management to restore public confidence that their department is capable of functioning efficiently and effectively. The public bemoans the fact that the police have not succeeded in successfully investigating, arresting and bringing to book top gang and crime bosses who are behind the extortion rackets. The apparent failure of crime intelligence has a lot to do with that.

A re-look at crime intelligence and effective policing should not be confined to the Cape Town area. Indications are that the extortion economy will expand to other centres throughout the country. From the perspective of organized crime groups and the extortion gangs involved, their model has worked well. The Khayelitsha model of first beating foreign traders in the townships into submission through murder and robbery, then receiving a steady and low-risk flow of extortion fees from them before turning to the massive new market of South African citizens from all walks, is likely to be exported to other cities. Townships in Port Elizabeth (Gqeberha) have already been targeted by Cape Town extortion gangs following a similar strategy to the one they adopted in Khayelitsha. There has been some resistance from the community and the police, and the criminal networks may not have succeeded yet in implementing the Khayelitsha model there, but it is only a matter of time. Effective policing and crime intelligence will therefore be a prerequisite for effectively countering extortion, including in areas beyond the Western Cape.

2. Develop a new reporting system for extortion that other role players can endorse and participate in.

It is generally accepted, including by the police, that the rate of reporting extortion is alarmingly low. This makes it difficult to police and investigate extortion effectively. The assurance by law enforcement that their toll-free phone numbers for reporting incidents of extortion are guaranteed to be confidential and safe has not made a dent in the low number of cases that are brought to their attention. Effective policing will therefore be enhanced if a trustworthy reporting system could be provided. The police, together with role players who have credibility and a constituency within the community, should therefore jointly explore how best to design a reporting system that enjoys credibility and trust. If, for example, organized business or a widely recognized faith group were to work out a system together with the SAPS that they can endorse, it may well lead to increased reporting rates. There is no ready formula, however, that can be put forward because in each area there are different role players that enjoy credibility and standing in communities. One approach might be a reporting system in which the police operate in partnership with one or more other role players, but without being in sole control of it.

3. Recognize extortion as a serious threat that should be accorded priority.

In Cape Town, many, and, not just the police, were caught by surprise by the recent escalation of extortion. There is no history of this form of crime being accorded special attention, and both the police and prosecuting authorities had not built up an institutional memory to guide them when investigating and prosecuting extortion cases. However, the current belated realization of the damage that extortion is doing to the social fabric of communities, to community safety, to economic development, tourism and governance now warrants a rapid and steep rise in the level of priority accorded to it by law enforcement and policymakers in South Africa. Conferring a higher priority to extortion would also justify additional resources being allocated to the police and other government departments to counter it.

4. Develop an integrated strategic provincial counter-extortion plan, incorporating specific proposals for central Cape Town and Khayelitsha.

Separate plans to address extortion are suggested for central Cape Town and for Khayelitsha but they should not be at cross purpose with provincial strategies to tackle extortion. A lesson from

international experience is that collective responses are required to counter extortion effectively.¹¹⁰ In addition to national government, those who have a co-responsibility or who are significantly affected by extortion, should be part of such an initiative. For central Cape Town, this would require the involvement of local government as well as relevant business and ratepayers' organizations.

The composition of Khayelitsha's population and civil society is more complex and it would not be appropriate to make specific proposals on who to include and what parts of Khayelitsha to cover without a better understanding of the complexity of that large township. This study did not set out to develop a reliable picture of Khayelitsha's social, political, and economic make-up. Some obvious role players, such as provincial and local government as well as organized business both within and outside of Khayelitsha, should clearly be part of such an initiative. Persons with expert knowledge about Khayelitsha should be approached for advice. Relevant community and interest group representatives ought to be involved without turning the initiative into a general *indaba*, where every interest group seeks representation. Instead, experts and role players who can form part of a working group should be considered.

A debilitating and self-created obstacle that will need to be addressed before a common approach to tackle extortion in central Cape Town or in Khayelitsha can be developed is the ongoing political squabbling and point scoring relating to law enforcement issues between the three tiers of government, i.e. national, provincial and municipal. Some fundamental differences between political parties are to be expected, but unless these are set aside for the purpose of developing a joint action plan against extortion, there is not much chance of success. The public quickly pick up when the city council, and provincial and national government are at each other's throat at their expense. With municipal elections approaching later in 2021, political leaders at all three levels of government will be watched closely by the citizens of Cape Town to check whether their interests are being served. There is a lot at stake.

5. Strengthen community resilience and mobilize community responses to link up with state initiatives.

Is it realistic to expect communities who are already intimidated and living in fear to develop a community response to extortion? It can be done. Before turning to an example from Cape Town, an initiative from Palermo, Sicily, where a community established a civil society organization to combat mafia extortion, provides an interesting precedent. It created a social movement against extortion payments – called '*pizzo*' in Italian – that the mafia was demanding. The civil society organization, AddioPizzo, developed a sophisticated programme of action to build resilience to organized crime and to push back against the mafia's stranglehold on the community. The nine recommendations that they offer are important to consider for any community responses to be developed in South Africa.¹¹¹

As useful and effective as community responses may be, the ultimate responsibility to address extortion rests with the state. The establishment of community responses therefore does not absolve the state of its responsibilities to act against extortion. Ideally, community responses should be implemented in coordination with state-led responses, so that they act in harmony with state-sanctioned security interventions. But there could be circumstances in which communities may prefer to act alone and in an attempt to effectively counter extortion.¹¹²

This is what happened in Bellville. However, the circumstances that prevailed in the Bellville CBD, where thousands of Somali nationals live and conduct business in an area often referred to as Little Mogadishu, made community action more likely to succeed than in most other areas. Some six or seven thousand¹¹³ Somali nationals live in a relatively small geographic area in Bellville.¹¹⁴

The community decided to take action against growing levels of crime and established a community patrolling initiative in the Belville CBD. This was before extortion rackets had reared their heads in townships. The patrolling initiative lasted from 2010 to 2014 and started off as a voluntary community initiative, with patrols seven nights a week. A member of the patrolling initiative said: 'We were very organized. There were two structures. One was the business owner's structure and the other one was run by the people who worked for the businesses. We sometimes caught persons and then chased them away or called the police. The police also appreciated it. We cooperated with them. We couldn't do more than the constitution allows us.'¹¹⁵

In 2015, the initiative was dissolved. There is currently good security in the CBD of Bellville, for which the local government is also co-responsible. Instead of patrolling the area themselves, Somali businesses now employ security companies to do it for them. There are currently no extortion rackets in Little Mogadishu but what has continued to occur is a form of extortion, namely kidnappings for ransom of prominent persons from the Somali community.¹¹⁶

The Bellville experience illustrates that community responses can be effective under certain circumstances. In other areas affected by extortion, the terrain is often far more complex, however. It should therefore not be regarded as a model that can be replicated elsewhere without considerable adjustments to meet local circumstances.

In central Cape Town, for example, extortion gangs have established a far greater footprint than in the Bellville CBD. But a community response in tandem with a fresh approach by law enforcement and other role players should also be explored. Factors that provide opportunities for new initiatives are the reality that extortion groups are entrenched only in certain parts of central Cape Town, such as where the nightclub economy thrives and Long Street, and that extortion groups are constantly involved in turf battles, rivalries and shifting allegiances. This presents opportunities to mobilize community and business responses in coordination with law enforcement and local government, and to then disrupt criminal networks and push back extortion.

A far greater challenge presents itself in Khayelitsha. It was not within the scope of this study to develop an understanding of all the interest groups in Khayelitsha, be they political, religious, cultural, faith, business, women or youth groups, or local government structures. It is crucial to have a proper understanding of who wields influence, who has a commitment to counter extortion, who has a following and who would be willing to contribute to a Khayelitsha community initiative to respond to extortion. The task of dislodging extortion networks in Khayelitsha is more complex than in most other areas because extortion groups have become entrenched in some important areas, individual members of the police reportedly have links with, and work for the groups, and an atmosphere of fear and intimidation is already pervasive.

Rather than suggesting specific steps that could be taken to mobilize a community response in Khayelitsha to counter extortion, key role players should meet in order to explore and develop a coordinated and longer-term strategy, and plan to counter extortion and enhance governance to reverse state collapse in parts of this urban area. Such role players should include national, provincial and local government, relevant community interest groups, and business interests. A proper study of all wards and geographic areas of Khayelitsha may also show that different approaches should be taken in different parts of Khayelitsha. But heads should be put together to come up with a fresh initiative. Extortion needs to be checked and attempts by organized criminal groups to push the state aside reversed.

NOTES

- 1 See Cape Town voted world's best city 2018, Cape Town etc, <https://www.capetownetc.com/travel/cape-town-voted-worlds-best-city-2018/>, 11 July 2018; CNN labels Cape Town one of the most beautiful cities, Cape Town etc, <https://www.capetownetc.com/news/cnn-labels-cape-town-one-of-the-most-beautiful-cities/>, 1 August 2018.
- 2 Interview, Marcus Oliver (not his real name), Cape Town, 4 December 2020.
- 3 Interview, Abdullah Omar (not his real name), Cape Town, 30 November 2020. 'Spaza shop' is a term used in South Africa for a small community grocery store.
- 4 See Directorate for Priority Crime Investigation, Sec 34 reporting guide, <https://www.saps.gov.za/dpci/reportingguide.php>.
- 5 Perhaps one notable exception to this heightened concern was the response from the CEO of the Cape Town Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Sid Peimer, who was not as perturbed as others by increasing reports of extortion rackets in Cape Town. According to Peimer, he did not know of anyone who had been a victim of extortion or who had paid protection money. The chamber does undoubtedly regard crime in general as a serious problem, but mainly crimes that are perceived to threaten personal safety: 'The biggest constraint that we have at the moment is the perception of poor personal safety,' said Peimer. The chamber's members had not reported on any unusual developments linked to extortion, although a small number of respondents in a survey distributed by the chamber did note concerns.
- 6 See, for example, Cape protection rackets accused of casting net wider after lockdown kills nightlife, TimesLIVE, 10 September 2020; Cele announces crackdown on businesses being 'bullied' by protection rackets in Cape Town, News24, 16 September 2020; Criminals allegedly demand protection fee from Khayelitsha residents, eNCA, 20 October 2020; Extortion gangs' link to Gugulethu massacre, reports, News24, 4 November 2020; 'I'm scared to work, I'm scared to run a business' – how extortion is killing township economy, fin24, 26 November 2020.
- 7 See Cape Town, South Africa metro area population, 1950–2021, Macrotrends, <https://www.macrotrends.net/cities/22481/cape-town/population>; Municipalities of South Africa, <https://municipalities.co.za/overview/6/city-of-cape-town-metropolitan-municipality>.
- 8 Considerable research has already been undertaken on the Cape Flats criminal economies, resulting in a better understanding of the criminal markets and actors involved. For a recent study covering the COVID-19 lockdown period, see, for example, Julia Stanyard, Gangs in lockdown: Impact of COVID-19 restrictions on gangs in east Africa and southern Africa, GI-TOC, October 2020, <https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Gangs-in-lockdown-Impact-of-Covid-19-restrictions-on-gangs-in-east-and-southern-Africa-GITOC.pdf>.
- 9 According to the 2011 census, the population of Khayelitsha was 391 749. However, there has been a significant growth in its population and the Western Cape provincial government's revised estimate for the 2021 population is 447 120. See Western Cape Government, Health, Circular H 102/2020, Population Data, 3 June 2020, https://www.westerncape.gov.za/assets/departments/health/h_102_2020_covid-19_population_data.pdf, 18.
- 10 See, for example, Jeff Wicks, Killing Kinnear: Secret report reveals infighting contributed to cop's death, News24, 16 April 2021, <https://www.news24.com/news24/southafrica/investigations/killing-kinne-ar-secret-report-reveals-infighting-contributed-to-cops-death-20210415>; Caryn Dolley, Smear and loathing: Cop versus cop versus gangster in an

unseemly melee that betrays the people's trust, *Daily Maverick*, 16 December 2020, <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2020-12-16-smear-and-loathing-cop-versus-cop-versus-gangster-in-an-unseemly-melee-that-betrays-the-peoples-trust/>.

- 11 Caryn Dolley, SAPS wars: Battle for Cape Town's police chief post intensifies in midst of turmoil, *News24*, 11 June 2019, <https://www.news24.com/news24/southafrica/news/amabhungane-news-analysis-saps-wars-battle-for-cape-towns-police-chief-post-intensifies-in-midst-of-turmoil-20190711>; Caryn Dolley, Smear and loathing: Cop versus cop versus gangster in an unseemly melee that betrays the people's trust, *Daily Maverick*, 16 December 2020, <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2020-12-16-smear-and-loathing-cop-versus-cop-versus-gangster-in-an-unseemly-melee-that-betrays-the-peoples-trust/>.
- 12 An anecdote from the author's observations in the late 1990s was a rumour circulating in Cape Town that Beeka was occasionally seen entering Cape Town's central police station on Friday afternoons with half a slaughtered sheep over his shoulder, ready for a braai with members of the police.
- 13 Caryn Dolley, *The Enforcers: Inside Cape Town's Deadly Nightclub Battles*. Johannesburg and Cape Town: Jonathan Ball Publishers, 2019, 58.
- 14 Ibid., 95.
- 15 Ibid., 96.
- 16 Ibid., 99.
- 17 Ibid., 106.
- 18 Ibid., 114.
- 19 Ibid., 58.
- 20 This case study is based on an interview with Marcus Oliver (not his real name), Cape Town, 4 December 2020.
- 21 This case study is based on an interview with Mario Ricardo (not his real name), Cape Town, 30 November 2020.
- 22 Interview, Mario Ricardo, Cape Town, 30 November 2020
- 23 The Western Cape's economic development agency.
- 24 Interview, Mario Ricardo, Cape Town, 30 November 2020
- 25 This account is based on an interview with David Hendricks (not his real name), Cape Town, 8 December 2020
- 26 Interview, Randolph Jorberg, 27 November 2020. This section is largely based on this interview and subsequent discussions. Jorberg was the only one of the extortion victims whom the author interviewed who agreed to be named in this report.
- 27 Randolph provided the author with their names but to protect him, their real names will not be revealed.
- 28 Not his real name.

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- 39 Western Cape Provincial Crime Analysis: analysis of Western Cape reported crime based on the 2018/19 crime statistics issued by the South African Police Services on 13 September 2019, December 2019, 55; see also table 34 on page 56, https://www.western-cape.gov.za/sites/www.westerncape.gov.za/files/wccs_crime_report_2020-03-25_medres.pdf.
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- 41 According to 'Sheik Nazir', there are a few other undertakers in the Cape Town area who bury Somali traders killed in townships. However, his guess is that he deals with about 70%–80% of such burials. In his view, about 99% of Somali traders whose death certificate describes their death as unnatural died as a result of gunshot wounds or stabbings. The remaining 1% could relate to motor vehicle accidents.

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- 43 Ibid.
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- 45 Interview, Somali activist and spaza shop owner, Cape Town, 30 November 2020.
- 46 Ibid.
- 47 Interview, Somali community leader, Cape Town, 23 November 2020.
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- 65 See, for example, Mark Shaw, *Hitmen for Hire: Exposing South Africa's Underworld*, Jonathan Ball, 2017.
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- 68 Interview, senior police officer, Cape Town, 14 January 2021.
- 69 The author is grateful to interviews with Philani Nombembe and Aron Hyman of *The Sunday Times*, Cape Town, 13 January 2021. Information about these gangs was also sourced, with approval, from Aron Hyman's Twitter feed, https://twitter.com/aron_hyman/status/1323696357937451011; https://twitter.com/aron_hyman/status/1336982581909327873; https://twitter.com/aron_hyman/status/1336981709066297348.
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- 83 Interview, Mark Oliver, Cape Town, 27 November 2020.
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- 87 Interview, community representative and activist from the Atlantic seaboard, Cape Town, 17 December 2020.
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