



Urban Violence

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Introduction

Ash Amin, Hugo Clarke

A majority of people live in urban areas, with cities home to 55% of the world's population, a figure that is expected to rise to 68% by 2050. Urbanisation, combined with overall population growth, could add another 2.5 billion people to urban areas, with close to 90% of the growth estimated to take place in Asia and Africa.

The process of urbanisation and the re-drawing of spatial and socio-political boundaries, through industrialisation, nation-building, segregation, and colonialism, create urban rupture and engender forms of violence. Cities past and present are constellations of contradictory flows and forces – of wealth and poverty, growth and stagnation, diversity and division, power and constraint, peace, and conflict. They are conglomerations of people characterised by proximity, mixing and intense relationships, economic centres and seats of government and power. In cities, the role of space and its contest, socio-economic relations, individual and collective mobilisation and symbols of power and faith also engender or prevent violence.

The rapid growth of cities alerts us to their economic, social, and environmental challenges and requires policymakers, researchers, community organisations, artists, and urban planners to work collaboratively and constructively to manage growth sustainably, tapping the potential benefits of urbanisation while avoiding its exclusionary and environmentally damaging tendencies. For instance, while cities occupy only 2% of the total land worldwide, they account for 70% of global GDP, 60% of global energy consumption, 70% of greenhouse gas emissions and 70% of global waste.

International policymakers have called for cities to be made 'inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable', Goal 11 of the UN's Agenda for Sustainable Development, highlighting the impact of violence on cities and the importance of preventing it, underlining the multi-dimensional approach to urban safety, and promoting the role of good governance and urban planning. However, at times the international policy community underestimates the plurality of cities, their aesthetics, their multi-level governance, as well as the lived experiences of people in cities.

Cities are spaces of refuge, resistance, and opportunity. They have provided protection against threats, including invasion and starvation, as well as care, shelter and access to services, infrastructures, and community networks. They are sites of public encounter underpinning cultures of sociability and civic sensibility and are manifestations of differences and heterogeneity. However, cities are also spaces within which and upon which diverse forms of violence are practiced to the extent that violence is rendered the assumed and widely accepted norm within the social, physical, spatial, and institutional urban experience. Cities are not only spaces where violence takes place, they are incubators that produce the unique conditions for urban violence to be both generated and understood. The inherent violence of cities is also a temporal phenomenon. Violence has always existed in and been produced by cities, demonstrably in the founding, flourishing and dominance of Ancient Rome. Colonial legacies and dismantled empires also shape violence in present cities through the persistence of colonial hierarchies and discrimination. Aimé Césaire's depiction of Fort-de-France in his poem *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land* foregrounds violence in consideration of the colonial city.

Violence in urban settings can be manifested by and inflicted upon diverse actors (including the state), along multiple intersectional axes (race, gender, class, ethnicity, etc.) in both real and imagined spaces. It redraws the boundaries of urban life as well as create and divide communities. Violence in these spaces is not only episodic, spontaneous, and sensational but is also slow, mundane, and structural. Narratives, aesthetics, and representations of urban violence are inherent to these dynamics. Manifestations of urban violence are – deliberately and/or incidentally – represented, memorialised, documented, commodified, and even sanctioned and contribute to shaping cities and violence in urban settings. This helps us understand the transformative powers of violence as well as what is specifically urban about violence. Critically, these narratives, as well as the aesthetics and representations of urban violence also contribute to fostering dialogue and reconciliation.

A number of pressing issues arise. Are cities inevitably places of conflict and thus potentially also of violence? How does the city as a space incubate and generate as well as experience violence? How does the aesthetics of built space – the urban fabric – embody an aesthetics and practice of exclusion or inclusion: what makes civic space civil? How does the city curate and circulate images of itself? How is urban violence represented and challenged through literature, museums, art, visual culture, or digital technology? How does the atmosphere of a city contribute to the lived experience of a city, especially a city of conflict? How should the feelings and social behaviour of citizens in an urban environment be understood to contribute to a sense of urban violence? How should scholars, artists and policymakers together approach the challenges posed by urban violence?

These considerations have been at the forefront of the Academy's series of activities related to the topic of urban violence since 2019. They have included roundtables on 'Theorising urban violence', 'Representing urban violence', and 'Addressing urban violence', a Knowledge Frontiers Symposium on 'Urban violence' in collaboration with the Brazilian Academy of Sciences, as well as a high-level panel on the topic of 'Access to services and infrastructures in the context of urban violence' at the World Urban Forum and in partnership with the International Committee of the Red Cross. The participating researchers, policymakers, and practitioners critically and imaginatively engaged with issues related to inequality, governance, urban planning, and representations. They examined the activities and potential of community-based organisations and artists. Without lapsing into prescriptive conclusions, they offered a range of interdisciplinary and geographical perspectives, examining violence as an urban process and how the physical, material, and immaterial qualities of cities, past and present, promote or prevent violence, shifting between the micro and macro levels throughout their analyses.

The contributions presented here embrace the full complexity of violence, as a social, historical, political, and environmental phenomenon, and its plurality, investigating different episodes of violence. They include extreme, criminal, political, economic, domestic, gender-based, sexual, and state violence. They provide a critical contribution to the understanding and dynamics of urban violence. Across these analyses, emerge a series of distinct reflections relevant to academics, policymakers, community organisations, urban planners, and artists. They address, *inter alia*, the social and cultural settings which allow the legacy and memorialisation of urban violence to foster an atmosphere of peace and cooperation, the importance and transformative effect of representations and performances in challenging narratives and lived experiences of urban violence as well creating communities of resistance and, finally, the importance of considering sensory disorders in cities and how they interplay with experiences of urban violence and atmospheres of insecurity.

In the first article, Greg Woolf invites us to think about the history of urban origins as the history of how violence was institutionalised. He argues that, with a few exceptions, early cities were created against a backdrop of violence and that violence permeated the lives of these cities. He states that economic, political, and religious institutions were responsible for domesticating and ritualising violence in early cities. Urbanism, he argues, relied on 'establishing clear rules about how violence could be used and by whom'.

Shadreck Chirikure examines the contribution of archaeology and archaeologists and interrogates the legacy of violence in cities and how it can permeate across time. He examines the deep histories of urban violence, within the varied contexts of falling empires, colonialism, and post-colonialism, and by analysing how violence and its impact on individuals and society have varied across times and geographies, he sets out a framework for how its heritage has the potential to foster atmospheres of peace and promote cooperation.

Ashvin Immanuel Devasundaram alerts us to the disproportionate way in which violence impacts the lives of marginalised and precarious people in cities. He gives examples of how film can be used to confront us with the uneven effects of violence, presenting the possibility of imagining resistance, but also shows how film can bring forgotten discourses from the margin to the centre, where multiple themes of race, gender, class, and sexuality intersect.

Cathy McIlwaine continues the reflections on the disproportionate way in which violence impacts marginalised and precarious people in cities. Reminding us of the invisibility of gendered violence, she analyses how violence against women and girls is embedded within the life of the city and delves into the multiple forms of gendered violence in urban areas. Nuanced, multiscalar analysis that situates gendered violence against women and girls in urban areas within a wider frame of the gendered processes of the urbanisation of violence, as developed by Cathy McIlwaine, are vital to our understanding of violence and the city and to meeting global policy commitments to address violence against women and girls in urban settings.

Interrogating narratives of urban violence, Katharine Low argues that they can fail to provide an account of the lived experiences of people in these spaces. She suggests that labelling urban areas as violent reduces the experience of those who live there to a stereotype and represents an affront to human dignity. She considers how the artistic intervention of performance-making as a public event can contribute to complicating the reporting of the felt and lived experience so as to create space for personhood, where the practice elevates the everyday stories of individuals, contributing to an understanding of the malleability of space.

Examining the issue of knife crime in Britain and its coverage, Charlotte Brunson argues that academic analyses of these issues are strengthened when considering artwork. Through examples of short films, a sculpture, and a musical performance, she suggests that the artworks provide a sense of what it is to live in violence. They provide 'glimpses of the compulsions which drive involvement in what participants recognise as destructive scenarios, as well as gesturing to the structural and institutional factors which make escape so difficult'. She argues that they also display our emotions associated with urban violence as they 'engage with the fear, the anxiety, the anger, the loss, the mourning'.

Reflecting on violence in Brussels, Alana Osbourne examines the living experiences of violence in cities and invites us to consider the sensory inputs of urban areas, noting that 'even when it does not involve physical injury, violence remains a sensory and affective affair – it is a recognised through feelings of injustice, isolation

or unease, affects which are mediated by combinations of smells, sights, sounds'. Proposing that 'research on the sensorial is especially useful for investigating how city dwellers work through changes in urban landscapes of (in)security', she analyses how amalgamations of smell, taste, touch, and other senses can work as signifiers of danger, and suggests that an embodied emphasis can inform our understanding and analyses of the spatial thresholds and signifiers of urban violence.

Wendy Pullan explores the physical qualities of infrastructures and how certain of their tangible features play a key role in generating urban violence and conflict. She investigates issues related to scale, division, and differentiation and argues that infrastructures do not function contextually and can be challenging to absorb into most urban circumstances. She notes that the inherent issues of infrastructures – not being on a human scale, tending to divide populations whether intentionally or accidentally, and being limited to a single use – challenge the objective of an open and diverse urban space and fabric. Infrastructures which offer only minimal and limited engagement with cities and their inhabitants, act as a void in the city and encourage violence.

Alcides Eduardo dos Reis Peron provides a critical review of surveillance systems and the management of security in cities. Far from preventing violence, he explores how surveillance becomes the means through which 'structural violence is reproduced, and how it mediates direct violent practices'. He argues that surveillance enables 'an asymmetric relationship of power, which is manifested through the production of knowledge and the ruling of the rhythm and functioning of bodies'.

Jamal Khan, Shiraz Shaikh and Mirwais Khan focus on the city of Karachi and the issue of access to services and infrastructures in the context of urban violence. They delve into the causes of violence occurring in healthcare settings, which has increased in the context of COVID-19, and examine how the International Committee of the Red Cross's Healthcare in Danger (HCiD) initiative, which encompasses practical measures and operational responses at national and local levels, can provide a framework to prevent violence in healthcare settings.

The final chapter focuses on violence prevention and the work of Violence Reduction Units (VRUs) in the United Kingdom. Laurelle Brown, Elisha Coates, Jerome Harvey-Agyei, Jane Leaman, David Oseil, and Karina Wane, Davis Osei, Laurelle Brown, Jane Leaman, Jerome Harvey-Agyei and Elisha Coates suggest that preventing violence requires interrogating and tackling the conditions in which it emerges. They advocate addressing urban violence as a public health issue, recommending a multidisciplinary approach bringing together local government, youth work, law enforcement, community engagement, and public health, and arguing for place-based measures and more analysis of the factors which protect against violence.

Urban violence in ancient cities

Greg Woolf

The historical sociologist Philip Abrams once wrote:

the history of towns commands attention as a history of appropriation and resistance, internal and external war, defiance and monopoly, a history in which resources are concentrated for the pursuit of some struggle, for the enhancement of power.¹

Abrams' injunction is especially useful for historians of ancient urbanism. It reminds us that the cities we mostly study through the monuments that proclaim stability and permanence were at one time socially chaotic places. The Roman Forum, the Athenian Acropolis, and the great temples of Luxor in Egypt are like the durable skeletons of dinosaurs. The urban societies that built, rebuilt, defaced and repurposed them over the centuries were vital and often violent. Urbanism did not rest on pacifying violent populations, but on establishing clear rules about how violence could be used and by whom.

Today we sometimes blur the line between civil society and civic society. We imagine cities as normatively peaceful and functional human environments. Urban violence is, as a consequence, often viewed as a disruption of the civic order. This was not true in the past. Ancient cities in particular depended on a dynamic economy of violence, both internal and external. A city was not just a concentration of resources (in Abrams' phrase) but also a focus of conflict.

Violence and the first cities

It is widely accepted that most prehistoric societies were quite violent, but they were not all violent in the same way. *Organised* inter-societal violence seems to have been rare among hunter-gatherers.² The exceptions suggest a link between sedentarism and warfare. Interpersonal violence was another matter. The importance of co-operation within groups regularly gives rise to 'retaliatory violence' against freeloaders, if only because few other sanctions are available.³ Primitive warfare seems to have appeared around the world with agriculture. This is illustrated by a growing dossier of evidence from physical anthropology from Neolithic and later societies, as well as by the appearance of fortifications and weaponry.⁴ When cities and states first appeared – around six thousand years ago – most were well equipped for battle. Early literatures from Gilgamesh to Homer to the Poetic Edda and Mayan glyphs celebrate warriors and their victories. The same is true of early monumental art from the Standard of Ur to the friezes of Greek temples. Not all societies display all these features. The palaces of Minoan Crete, the cities of the Indus Valley civilisation and the lake city of Tenochtitlan in Mexico were unfortified. But the overwhelming majority of early cities seem to have been created against a background of violence,

1 P. Abrams (1978), 'Towns and Economic Growth. Some Theories and Problems', in P. Abrams and E.A. Wrigley eds, *Towns in Societies. Essays in Economic History and Historical Sociology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 9-33 (p. 32).

2 A.E. Nivette (2011), 'Violence in Non-State Societies: A Review', *The British Journal of Criminology*, Vol.51 No.3, pp.578-598.

Compare I. Morris (2014), *War. What Is It Good For? The Role of Conflict in Civilisation, from Primates to Robots* (London: Profile Books).

3 C. Boehm (2011), 'Retaliatory Violence in Human Prehistory', *The British Journal of Criminology*, Vol.51 No.3, pp.518-534.

4 I. Armit (2011), 'Violence and Society in the Deep Human Past', *The British Journal of Criminology*, Vol.51 No.3, pp.499-517.

and probably by acts of violence too, whether that involved coercing populations into urban spaces or extracting the food and materials they needed from neighbouring rural populations.

The phenomenon of city-states is widely attested around the globe.⁵ Many archaeologists treat both urbanisation and state-formation as components in the rise of complex societies, societies that were marked by increased differentiation of economic and social roles.⁶ This differentiation also operated at the scale of landscape, creating social distance between centres and hinterlands, cores and peripheries and also within society, where increased inequalities were rapidly sedimented into hierarchies of birth, class, caste and so on. Both cities and states have been seen as solutions to new problems posed by changes in both the scale and complexity of late prehistoric societies.⁷ Those solutions served some parts of society more than others. As the nature of cooperation changed in the direction of more organic solidarity, so intra-societal violence assumed new forms. Early states regularly co-opted their citizens into military bodies in Sumer, China, Greece and elsewhere. Intra-state violence served not only to protect resources and (occasionally) acquire new ones, but also to strengthen political identity and social cohesion. Violence in ancient city-states was not a disruption of the social order, but the basis for it.

The history of urban origins may be written as the history of how violence was institutionalised. Max Weber famously characterised the state as a community that successfully claimed a monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory. He went on to explain that his definition was limited to contemporary society.

Specifically, at the present time, the right to use physical force is ascribed to other institutions or to individuals only to the extent to which the state permits it. The state is considered the sole source of the 'right' to use violence. Hence, 'politics' for us means striving to share power or striving to influence the distribution of power, either among states or among groups within a state.⁸

Ancient states were much weaker and less extensive than modern ones, and the social order depended on other institutions, most of them older than the state but now co-opted to new ends. Two that stand out are the family and slavery. Violence against free members of the household was regarded as legitimate in many societies. Child exposure and infanticide was widespread and in some contexts domestic violence was celebrated. A Justinianic law allowed wives to claim compensation only if they had been beaten with sticks or whips, and then only if without provocation.⁹ Slave owners were held to possess a legitimate use of physical force against their slaves, including the right to torture and sometimes kill them. Religious institutions also made use of violence. Spartan youths were beaten in rites of passage. Torture and human sacrifice were performed in a number of pre-Columbian societies from the Andes to the Canadian Shield.

5 M.H. Hansen (2000), 'A Comparative Study of Thirty City-State Cultures. An Investigation Conducted by the Copenhagen Polis Centre', in *Historisk-Filosofiske Skrifter* (Copenhagen: Det Kongelige Dansk Videnskabernes Selskab); M.H. Hansen (2002), 'A Comparative Study of Six City-State Cultures. An Investigation Conducted by the Copenhagen Polis Centre', in *Historisk-Filosofiske Skrifter* (Copenhagen: Det Kongelige Dansk Videnskabernes Selskab).

6 M.E. Smith (2009), 'V. Gordon Childe and the Urban Revolution: A Historical Perspective on a Revolution in Urban Studies', *Town Planning Review*, Vol.80 No.1 pp.3-29.

7 For different versions of this argument see D.L. Clarke (1979), 'Towns in the Development of Early Civilisation', in N.G.L. Hammond ed., *Analytical Archaeologist. Collected Papers of David L. Clarke Edited by His Colleagues* (London/New York/San Francisco: Academic Press), pp. 435-43; N. Yoffee (2005), *Myths of the Archaic State. Evolution of the Earliest Cities, States, and Civilisations*, (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press); D. Wengrow (2018), 'The Origins of Civic Life. A Global Perspective', *Origini*, Vol.42 No.2, pp.25-44.

8 M. Weber (1946 [1919]), 'Politics as a Vocation', (New York: Oxford University Press), pp.3-4.

9 Leslie Dossey (2008), 'Wife Beating and Manliness in Late Antiquity', *Past & Present*. Vol.199 No.1 pp.3-40.

Violence in early cities was domesticated and ritualised, and early cities and states rested upon these pre-existing economies of social violence. This does not mean that the surrounding rural spaces were peaceful environments. Urban violence reached out to the urban hinterlands, and presumably the same kinds of violence that had preceded the state were common in the countryside although they are barely recorded. The difference was in the way violence was ordered in the city.

A case can be made that many early states did attempt to regulate violent behaviour. Archaic law codes in the Greek world and those of early mediaeval Europe devoted some attention to regulating feud. Early Greek legislation attributed to Solon, Cleisthenes and others seems to have been designed to defuse potential violent conflicts between rich and poor, between regional factions and occasionally different tribes. In Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, the creation of a court to try cases of homicide is presented as a means of allowing kinship groups to disengage from vendetta with honour intact.

Yet it might also be argued that by entrenching the rights of the wealthy, of slave owners, of male heads of household and of citizens, ancient states increased the level of what Galtung termed 'structural violence'.¹⁰ City-states, most of which were very small scale and tightly bounded communities, generated social niches within which structural violence might be maintained with few resources. And like so much else, violence was concentrated within cities.

Urban violence in Classical Antiquity

The cities of the ancient Mediterranean world between 500 BC and AD 500 provide a well-documented case study. One of the peculiarities of early urbanism in this part of the world was the generally small size of urban communities. Between 700 BC and 700 AD there were between one and two thousand cities in the region, depending on how the boundary with small towns is defined. Of these some three-quarters had populations of fewer than five thousand individuals.¹¹ As population centres, then, they were on the same scale as larger Neolithic villages even if their populations were more socially differentiated. Urban violence in a community of a few thousand individuals seems to have been rare, although the documentation is not good. Historians know much more about cities with populations of tens of thousands, or the handful that under Roman rule had more than 100,000 inhabitants.

Written history began in the late fifth century BC and did include some stories about conflicts around the establishment and disruption of tyrannies. Cities were the sites of coups and counter coups not because they were centres of government institutions (which in that period barely existed) but because their temples and other communal sites had great symbolic value. There is little sign of civic disturbances based on ethnic, religious or racial discord although some conflicts between tribes and clans probably reflect the power of kinship networks to mobilise force. Civic populations were generally homogenous as well as small, and few had minorities in the modern sense. It was common for a city-state to unite around ideologies of common descent, common cult and attachment to particular places important in myth of history.

Because classical cities relied on citizen-soldiers and had no real police forces, it was rarely possible for state authorities to suppress urban unrest by force or the

¹⁰ J. Galtung (1969), 'Violence, Peace, and Peace Research', *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol.6 No.3 pp.167-191.

¹¹ M.H. Hansen and T.H. Nielsen (2004), *An Inventory of Archaic and Classical Poleis. An Investigation Conducted by the Copenhagen Polis Centre for the Danish National Research Foundation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press); A. Wilson (2011), 'City Sizes and Urbanisation in the Roman Empire', in A. Bowman and A. Wilson eds, *Settlement, Urbanisation, and Population* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), pp.161-95.

threat of force.¹² When episodes of violent disruption occurred, they often had the character of civil wars (*staseis*) aligned with external conflicts. Pro- and anti-Athenian, Spartan, Macedonian or Roman groups contested for the control of cities rather as did Guelph and Ghibelline factions in late mediaeval Italy. Thucydides provided an analysis of a *stasis* in the city of Corcyra (on modern Corfu), which he intended to be paradigmatic.¹³ The conflict between pro-Athenian democrats and pro-Spartan oligarchs is presented as leading to a comprehensive breakdown of morality, trust and civic discourse. In some cases, such as the late fifth century coup and counter coup in Athens, episodes of intra-communal violence could only be solved by amnesties. Other conflicts led to small groups of exiles being sheltered by neighbouring communities, who occasionally tried to restore them to power.

Traditions about Republican Rome describe conflicts based on social class, sometimes understood as being struggles for political inclusion. In the last centuries BC there were some conflicts in which their clients supported rival aristocrats. The Gracchan crisis is understood as a sign that traditional modes of competition were no longer sufficient to resolve political differences, but the violence unleashed was made possible by pre-existing institutions.¹⁴ The situation changed in the last century BC when Rome's military expansions led to the formation of armies whose loyalty to their commanders meant they could be used to intimidate voters and civil authorities and even to take up arms against fellow citizens. Popular leaders were lynched, various Republican leaders sponsored gangs and there were bloodbaths in Rome.¹⁵

Rome emerged from two generations of violence of this sort with a standing army controlled by the emperors. Major detachments were placed at the edge of the largest cities including Rome, Alexandria, Antioch and Constantinople. Riots arose for various reasons. There were protests at rises in food prices, and some rioting was organised by circus factions.¹⁶ Some riots seem to have been motivated by the unpopularity of particular courtiers or members of the imperial family. Jewish diaspora communities were occasionally targeted, in Rome, in the larger Greek cities and especially in Alexandria.¹⁷ Religious-based violence only became common when it occurred between different Christian groups in late antiquity.¹⁸ Riots are best attested in the largest cities, and perhaps they were more common there simply because crowds gathered in larger numbers and had more anonymity. But events like the bloody fighting between the people of Pompeii and those of its neighbour Nuceria, arising from riots inside an amphitheatre, suggest there may have been incidents of urban violence that remain unattested.

Quite often riots in the largest cities seem to have taken place within the parameters of quasi-formal exchanges between rulers and subjects, which also included acclamations, dispersal of gifts, and celebrations of loyalty. The phenomenon is familiar from other periods.¹⁹ But there were also some spontaneous riots like that recorded at Ephesus in the Great Theatre in the Acts of the Apostles. Riots and protests frequently took place at the circus or hippodrome or in the amphitheatre or theatre. Rulers were generally restrained and only a few massacres of civilians

12 W. Nippel (1995), *Public Order in Ancient Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

13 Thucydides, *War against the Peloponnesians* 3.82.

14 A. Lintott (1968), *Violence in Republican Rome* (Oxford: Clarendon Press); A. Lintott (1982), *Violence, Civil Strife and Revolution in the Classical City 750-330 B.C.* (London: Croom Helm Press).

15 P.A. Brunt (1966), 'The Roman Mob', *Past & Present* Vol.35 No.1, pp.3-27.

16 P. Garnsey (1988), *Famine and Food Supply in the Greco-Roman World. Responses to Risk and Crisis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press); A. Cameron (1966), *Circus Factions. Blues and Greens at Rome and Byzantium* (Oxford: Clarendon Press); Brunt, 'The Roman Mob'.

17 S. Gambetti (2009), *The Alexandrian Riots of 38 C.E. and the Persecution of the Jews. A Historical Reconstruction* (Leiden: Brill).

18 B.D. Shaw (2011), *Sacred Violence. African Christians and Sectarian Hatred in the Age of Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

19 E. Le Roy Ladurie (1979), *Le Carnaval de Romans. De la Chandeleur au Mercredi des Cendres, 1579-1580* (Paris: Gallimard).

are recorded. Most notable were those in Alexandria in 216, in Thessalonica in 390 and the Nika riots in Constantinople in 532 which left thousands dead.

The rarity of riots and of collective unrest by urban populations does not mean that ancient cities were secure and safe environments. The wealthy typically moved around them surrounded by slaves, other attendants and sometimes clients who might protect them from assault. Roman officials were regularly escorted on their travels by detachments of soldiers. Papyri from Egypt record many crimes of violence, most of which did not result in trial.²⁰ Courts and magistrates used violence to enforce their power, from the judicial torture of slaves to the public scourging of convicted criminals. Roman law specified the kinds of violence that could be applied to criminals according to their rank. Violence was both a currency of power, and a medium for expressing it.

Cities, as Abrams saw, were centre stage in all this, because they provided the largest public spaces for exemplary public punishment. Athenian criminals might be executed by exposure to the elements. Traitors were thrown off the Capitol in Rome down the Gemonian steps. The captured gladiators of Spartacus' army were crucified along the Appian Way on its approach to Rome. Mark Antony had the head and hands of Cicero displayed on the speakers' rostrum in the Roman forum. The elaborate executions of criminals in the Roman amphitheatre made clear the social hierarchy on which the relative security of citizens depended. The point seems not to have been to suppress urban violence, but to make clear who was entitled to use violence on whom.

The archaeology of urban violence: from falling empires to colonialism and post-colonialism

Shadreck Chirikure

Introduction: urban development across the ages

Urban centres of the past were human settlements where people lived, owned property, worshipped, and rulers exercised power and authority; they were arenas for work, for contestation and inequality, making them sites of violence, peace and struggle. Research by archaeologists and other social scientists has, over the centuries, outlined major transformations accompanying human socio-cultural organisation through time.¹ For example, anthropologists of the late 19th and early 20th centuries classified societies into a linear evolutionary hierarchy, starting with savagery, followed by barbarism, civilisation being the most progressive. The savagery stage was dominated by hunting and gathering; barbarism by agriculture; while civilisation was characterised by cities and state level societies.² According to Childe (1950), the inception of farming inaugurated the Neolithic Revolution in Eurasia, which produced surplus food, allowing for specialisation and division of labour to precipitate the transformation of small kin-based groups into cities and states (Urban Revolution) from 5,000 BC onwards.³ The implication is that humans were more violent during the earlier stages than they were in the later ones.

What, however, is the definition of a city or urban settlement in the deep past? Childe (1950) was clear about the difficulty of defining ancient cities.⁴ Nevertheless, he outlined ten major characteristics of urban areas and by extension states and civilisations. These include the presence of occupational specialisation, surplus accumulation, monumental public buildings, and predictive sciences. Childe identified the cities of Sumer, Ancient Egypt, and the Indus Valley as representing the first urban centres in the world.

Apart from being Eurocentric, Childe's traits failed to cover the full array of urban experiences across the world's cultures and regions.⁵ In some cases, there was synchronicity (e.g. Middle East, Indus), but in others (e.g. Africa and the Americas), historical processes played out differently across space and time, with divergent results.⁶ In archaeology, cities are defined as functionally specialised central places populated by socially heterogeneous groups.⁷ Continuing research keeps exposing the tremendous disparities exhibited by ancient urban centres.⁸ In Africa alone,

1 S. Chirikure (2020), 'Shades of Urbanism(s) and Urbanity in Pre-Colonial Africa: Towards Afro-Centred Interventions', *Journal of Urban Archaeology*, 1, 49-66; C.R Ember, and M Ember, (1997) 'Violence in the ethnographic record: Results of cross-cultural research on war and aggression', in D.W. Frayer and D.L. Martin eds, *Troubled times: Violence and warfare in the past* (Taylor & Francis), pp.1-20.

2 G. Childe (1950). 'The Urban Revolution' *The Town Planning Review*, 21, 1, pp. 3-17.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

5 S.K. McIntosh (1999), 'Pathways to Complexity: An African Perspective', in S.K. McIntosh ed., *Beyond Chiefdoms: Pathways to Complexity in Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 1-30.

6 S.P. Blier (2012), 'The African Urban Past: Historical Perspectives on the Metropolis', in D. Adjaye ed., *African Architecture* (London: Thames and Hudson).

7 L. Wirth (1938), 'Urbanism as a Way of Life', *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol.44 No.1, pp.1-24.

8 M.E. Smith (2009), 'V. Gordon Childe and the Urban Revolution: An Historical Perspective on a Revolution in Urban Studies', *Town Planning Review*, Vol.80 pp.3-29.

the range of variation is staggering: from cities characterised by monumental architecture (e.g. Hierakonpolis, Great Zimbabwe, Axum, Kilwa), through those made up of large congregations of people surrounded by extensive mud walls in a network (satellite urbanism of the Yoruba of Nigeria) to peripatetic and mobile urbanism where large cities built of perishable materials were abandoned after every few years or decades (e.g. capitals of Luba and Lunda in Central Africa, Zulu capitals, medieval Ethiopian capitals).⁹ Variable as they were, urban centres were sites of violence, whose expression in the material and non-material records differed from place to place, and time to time.

Archaeological correlates of collective and interpersonal violence

With a chequered history across cultures, urban spheres and time periods, violence – interpersonal or collective – is doubly a social and cultural construct.¹⁰ Martin and Harrod (2015) define violence as the use of physical force to kill or injure; it can be lethal, non-lethal and structural.¹¹ Violence is part of human history and manifested differently across urban centres of different geographies and time periods.¹² It is associated with social spheres of authority and power wedded to everyday existence, environmental stress, multiplying population amidst dwindling resources, and territorial contestation.¹³ Appearing in direct and indirect forms, archaeological indicators of violence fall into the material and non-material categories. Some compelling indicators include landscape modification, impact of weapons on human remains and property, intentional destruction of settlements, ramparts, weapons, refugee places, statues and commemorative plaques.¹⁴

Interrogating such evidence, archaeologists identify hints of trauma, cultures of honour, ritualised deaths, social reproduction of violence, warfare, raiding, slavery, homicide, genocide and much more. For example, the AD 960 ‘Axed Man’ recovered from a Viking Age site at Mosfell, Iceland had two gaping wounds each produced by the blade of a heavy weapon.¹⁵ Fortifications such as the Great Wall of China or Hadrian’s Wall in Britain easily stand out on the landscape. The practice of erecting statues to honour war leaders and the fallen also indirectly speaks to the violence associated with warfare, raiding, terrorism and so on. Generally, material culture style and textual evidence as well as inscriptions and oral traditions help to define the cultural identity of people responsible for remains in the archaeological record.¹⁶ Interpersonal and collective violence were not uncommon, making cities of the past theatres of violence underpinned by cultural logics operating within social relationships and deeply entrenched structures.¹⁷

9 Blier, ‘The African Urban Past’.

10 Ember and Ember, ‘Violence in the ethnographic record’.

11 D.L. Martin and R.P. Harrod (2015), ‘Bioarchaeological contributions to the study of violence’, *American Journal of Physical Anthropology*, Vol.156 pp.116-145.

12 N.C. Kim, C.M. Kusimba, and L.H. Keeley (2015), ‘Coercion and warfare in the rise of state societies in southern Zambezia’, *African Archaeological Review*, Vol.32 No.1, pp.1-34.

13 S.D. Spencer (2012), ‘Detecting violence in the archaeological record: Clarifying the timing of trauma and manner of death in cases of cranial blunt force trauma among pre-Columbian Amerindians of West-Central Illinois’, *International Journal of Paleopathology*, Vol.2 No.2-3, pp.112-122; P. Walker, J. Byock, J. Erlandson, P. Holck, J. Eng, H. Schwarz and D. Zori (2012), ‘The axed man of Mosfell: skeletal evidence of a Viking Age homicide and the Icelandic sagas’, in Ann L.W. Stodder and Ann M. Palkovich eds, *The Bioarchaeology of Individuals* (University Press of Florida), pp.26-43.

14 L. Keeley (1996), *War Before Civilisation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press); N.C. Kim (2013), ‘Cultural Landscapes of War and Political Regeneration’, *Asian Perspectives* Vol.52 No.2 pp. 244-267.

15 Walker et al., ‘The axed man of Mosfell’.

16 S. Chirikure, M. Manyanga and A.M. Pollard (2012), ‘When Science Alone Is Not Enough: Radiocarbon Timescales, History, Ethnography and Elite Settlements in Southern Africa’, *Journal of Social Archaeology*, Vol. 12 pp.356-79.

17 Ember and Ember, ‘Violence in the ethnographic record’.

From falling empires to colonialism and post-colonialism: examples of urban violence from Africa and elsewhere

Within cities and states, contestations over political power prompted collective and interpersonal violence. The Torwa-Changamire state, administered from the city of Khami, dominated territory in southwestern Zimbabwe and north-eastern Botswana from AD 1450-1650.¹⁸ The city is made up of monumental drystone walling, forming platforms scattered over more than 120 hectares. Situated in an area rich in gold and ivory, Khami was a prosperous entity. The system of political succession was however convoluted. Upon death of kings, rival claimants fought until a winner emerged. Sometime in around 1650, some rival claimants to the throne allied with the Portuguese on the Zambezi river and laid siege to Khami, destroying houses and burning property. Excavations yielded evidence of large scale burning and destruction, while ritual objects among others were still near their original position, showing that the place was abruptly abandoned and never reoccupied.¹⁹ Interestingly, in northern Zimbabwe, the Mutapa state, an entity coeval with the Torwa-Changamire state, also frequently experienced civil wars. This resulted in the construction of loop-holed stone walled settlements and strongholds such as Muchekayawa Hill, which massively transformed the landscape for aggressive and defensive purposes.²⁰ These fortifications, which were sometimes situated in mountains and high places, speak to the violence of northern Zimbabwe after AD 1500.

Still in southern Africa, changing climates resulted in shortage of food and population pressure over land, food and other resources, stimulating violence which contributed to the formation of the 19th century Zulu state. The Zulu economy was sustained by raiding, where the bounty from raids represented 'military honour' and was redistributed amongst generals. The dominance of militarism resulted in the militarisation of the landscape, especially the establishment of barracks at strategic points. Ripple effects from the Zulu state were far reaching: some groups migrated thousands of kilometres, establishing new states and economies based on raiding. One such group formed the Ndebele state under Mzilikazi and his successor Lobengula. Once established in southwestern Zimbabwe, Ndebele monarchs raided both neighbouring and distant groups for cattle, grain, women and children. Often, this created insecurity prompting the inhabitants of cities prone to raids to move to awkward places such as mountain tops or caves. With the coming of colonialism, the Ndebele state was invaded by Cecil Rhodes' British South Africa Company. King Lobengula's capital Bulawayo was burnt down, cattle were confiscated, while he was pursued till he died. As a sign of triumph, Bulawayo became the capital city of the new colony while the State House was built on the site formerly occupied by Lobengula. Rhodes later chose a burial spot in the Matopo Hills where African kings were buried. To some, Rhodes' grave is a perpetual symbol of the violence associated with colonial rule.

Shifting to another region in the world, the material record offers insights into both interpersonal and collective forms of violence in the deep past. For example, in the last centuries BC, East and Southeast Asia saw landscape modification to create large-scale fortifications.²¹ Such alterations materialised human contributions and responses to organised violence as different groups duelled each other to control

18 Chirikure, 'Shades of Urbanism(s) and Urbanity in Pre-Colonial Africa'.

19 K.S.R. Robinson (1959), *Khami ruins: Report on excavations undertaken for the commission for the preservation of natural and historical monuments and relics, Southern Rhodesia, 1947-1955* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

20 I. Pikirayi (2000), 'Wars, violence, and strongholds: An overview of pre-colonial fortified settlements in northern Zimbabwe, 1550-1750 AD', *Journal of Peace, Conflict and Military Studies* Vol.1 No.1 pp.1-12.

21 Keeley, *War Before Civilisation*.

resources and territory. The iconic Great Wall of China began as a series of distinct walls during the Warring States era of the first millennium BC when different states vied for supremacy (Kim 2013).²² Eventually, the disparate pieces were joined to create a single continuous barrier. According to Kim (2013), these activities in China elicited responses in Southeast Asian regions such as Vietnam. During the same period, around 300 BC, the Au Lac kingdom in present-day Vietnam built and fortified its capital of Co Loa with an intricate system of earthen ramparts and moats encompassing approximately 600 hectares of terrain. Despite these defences, Co Loa was taken over by Han Dynasty China which took full hold of the region from AD100 onwards.²³ The Great Wall of China and the system of ramparts in Vietnam, Korea, Japan and other places in the region show the extent to which collective violence and its undercurrents have changed the landscape and created an Eastern and South East Asian identity distinct from other world areas.

In contexts of war and conflict, victors often collected spoils of war. In Africa, the collapse of indigenous empires and their replacement by colonial regimes towards the close of the 19th century was accompanied by despoliation and export of objects to imperial repositories such as the British Museum, the Louvre and many others.²⁴ The British capture of Benin in 1897 was accompanied by the looting of sacred objects from the Royal Palace. The violence associated with the Benin objects is institutionalised in the museums holding these items in their collections today, while their commodification enriches collectors. Furthermore, those who spearheaded imperial plunder of colonies were often rewarded with statues in public spaces such as Trafalgar Square. The effect of all the plunder, the associated violence and the structural inequalities going back to the slave trade cumulatively creates vistas of violence at inter-group and collective levels. Meanwhile, a failure to balance presentation by including African, Indian and other stories of the previously colonised gives prominence to one narrative – that of violence and racial inequality. This makes layered urban places such as London, palimpsests of collective violence, and multiple identities including the oppressor and oppressed. Objects, statues, plaques and spaces speak different languages; they are celebratory for some but violently heartbreaking for others. Urban spaces remain sites of individual and collective violence through a display of conquest, plunder, entrenchment of social inequality, racism and many other things. This demands sensitive and considered, contextual representation of history, space and identities.

Conclusion

In conclusion, archaeology through its long-term perspectives, affords an opportunity to explore the nature of and shifts in violence through geographies and time periods. A lot however depends on the context of the evidence and how that is interpreted. As sites of contestation and inequality, urban centres are historically arenas of violence in its hard and softer forms. Human beings through time learned to manage and co-exist with violence. However, the heritage of violence if considered in an inclusive way, and on a context-by-context basis, has potential to foster atmospheres of peace and promote cooperation across cultures and regions – in the present and future.

22 N.C. Kim (2013), 'Cultural Landscapes of War and Political Regeneration'. *Asian Perspectives* Vol.52 No.2, pp. 244-267.

23 Ibid.

24 D Hicks, (2020). *The Brutish Museums: The Benin Bronzes, Colonial Violence and Cultural Restitution*. (London: Pluto Press).

Framing police-related urban violence: cinematic crosscurrents from the Global South

Ashvin Immanuel Devasundaram

Introduction

The brutal police killing of George Floyd on 25th May 2020 shone a spotlight on acts of violence by police forces. In India, the National Human Rights Commission recorded 1,723 deaths in police custody in 2019. In Brazil, the police shooting of 14-year old João Pedro Matos Pinto in May 2020 has been labelled part of ‘a state-sponsored “genocide” of Brazil’s black youth’¹. The events circumscribing these police-orchestrated murders in the USA, India and Brazil, are broadly comparable as manifestations of urban violence inflicted on minority individuals by agents of the state. How does one explain the glaring discrepancy between democratic constitutional principles and the daily disavowal of these constitutional precepts through indiscriminate violence by law enforcers?

Film is a medium that can be moulded to identify inconsistencies between principles relating to rule of law, human rights and civil liberties and the state-sanctioned violence that undermines, violates and reneges on these nation-state nostrums. Films in various forms can therefore act not only as ‘whistle blowers’ but also as a litmus test of the implementation or contravention of democratic constitutional principles on the ground.

In this sense, a film can bring forgotten discourses from the margins to the centre. Cornel West argues for ‘acknowledging the central role of the arts’ in the struggle against racial injustice, imperialism, autocratic and institutional power. West proposes that ‘oppressed people ought to be the lens through which we look at the world’². In this regard, specific types of film constitute an important looking glass as we engage in processes of mapping connections and raising international conversations around racial justice, equality, civil rights and liberties.

This essay draws parallels between several moving image representations of urban violence linking the police force and marginalised, precarious and minority individuals and social groups. Whilst focusing on India, Brazil and South Africa in favour of a Global South perspective, I will demonstrate connections with the contexts of western nations including the USA and UK, where introspections on disproportionalities of law enforcement, racial justice and colonial legacies are especially pertinent and sharply in focus. If structures and institutions are conjoined with attitudes and dispositions, visual texts play an important role in interrogating the former and shaping the latter. Versatile forms of the moving image – independent fiction and documentary films, TV and web series and unpremeditated citizen

1 T. Phillips (2020), ‘Black Lives Shattered: Outrage As Boy, 14, Is Brazil Police’s Latest Victim’ [online] *Guardian*.

Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jun/03/brazil-black-lives-police-teenager> [Accessed 16 July 2020].

2 Equality Labs (2020), ‘Black Dalit and Sheedi Solidarities’, Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0oCDP2OStDg&t=700s> [Accessed 10 July 2020].

journalist videos – can frame penetrating perceptions of urban violence through interpellation, interpretation, intersectionality and imagination.

Interpellation involves the momentary insertion of the film spectator into the possibilities surrounding the onscreen act of violence and characters portrayed. Viewers can choose multiple proactive and reactive responses; from immersion, participation and identification to disengagement or outright rejection³ of a film's representation. Viewer reactions to visual images of violence are variegated and subjective across global cultural, social and regional contexts.

Interpretation involves the film's figurative (re)construction of urban violence – the ideological standpoint, formal and stylistic cinematic approaches to representing urban violence. Film form and style including mise-en-scène, performance, cinematography, music and editing can evoke human empathy and identification. In spontaneous citizen witness footage, the visceral, real-time rendition of police violence constricts time and space to convey the immediate impact of urban violence. These witness videos, which are often adopted as a stylistic or aesthetic template in fiction and documentary films, can also serve as evidence of police violence.

Intersectionality relates to the ability of film to grapple simultaneously with multiple themes of race, identity, gender, class and sexuality. The films presented in this essay foreground victims of police brutality ranging from women, ethnic minorities, LGBTQ individuals and slum dwellers to 'lower-caste' Indian Dalit migrant workers.

Imagination – films can present the possibility of imagining resistance, offering strategies to challenge state-orchestrated violence and demand reform. This imaginative property of cinema is especially important where justice has been denied or is unlikely to be forthcoming through official channels.

Creating a tapestry of films from India, Brazil, South Africa and beyond could help identify global intersections, patterns and specificities of police-related urban violence.

Cinematic point of view and marginal narratives

The point of view (POV) of protagonists in films can interpellate or position viewers to reflect on the role, accountability and complicity of individuals and society in acts of violence. For example, the independent Indian film *Soni* (2018) is centred on the eponymous female police officer, as she navigates the bureaucratic and male-dominated arena of the Delhi police force. The film presents an insight into impenetrable hierarchies, a misogynistic chain of command and the female solidarity between Soni and her senior superintendent colleague, as the two women confront gender-based violence on Delhi streets and a police force patriarchy that stymies their autonomy and career prospects. This police officer POV is mirrored in the male perspective of Delhi-based inspector Hathi Ram in the series *Paatal Lok/ Netherworld* (2020). This police procedural uses its narrative canvas to disclose links between corrupt police echelons, Hindu fundamentalist political parties and prominent news media channels. The series' intersectional interpretive approach also includes allegorical censure of the true-life murders and incarceration of people who have spoken out against Hindu religious populist politics under Narendra Modi's BJP-led government.⁴

3 D. Fassin (2013), *Enforcing Order: An Ethnography of Urban Policing* (Cambridge: Polity) p.7.

4 S. Deb (2020), 'Killing Press Freedom in India', in T. Burrett and J. Kingston eds, *Press Freedom in Contemporary Asia* (New York: Routledge), pp. 281-295.

A high-profile case in which Hathi Ram becomes involved includes the arrest of a transgender character, pejoratively nicknamed ‘Cheeni’ for her ‘Chinese’ appearance and played by transgender female actor Mairembam Ronaldo Singh from the north-eastern Indian state of Manipur. Cheeni bears the brunt of police brutality on several counts, owing to her migrant stranger and sexual minority status. Tamil language Indian film *Super Deluxe* (2019) deploys claustrophobic framing and rapid editing to depict a trans woman whose resilience and tenacity are demonstrated when she fights back against police officers violently assaulting her in the confines of a station precinct.

The intersectional aspects of the above films and web series are embedded in their exploration of policing, politics, religion, gender, sexuality, social and cultural mores alongside diegetic spatial focus on the urban police station as a site of violence. Multidimensional themes fold into an array of interpretive formal and stylistic methods including title cards containing statistical information, casting of minority ethnic characters, blending and breaking of film genre conventions and interspersing of factual details within fictional narration. These films ultimately reveal that official legislation and regulations notwithstanding, a preponderance of victims of ‘arbitrary detention, torture and inhuman conditions’ include those from the lowest classes, children, LGBTQ individuals, religious, ethnic and indigenous minorities.⁵

Sequences in the abovementioned Indian films draw comparisons with Australian film *Head On* (1998). A Greek-Australian transgender person Johnny/Toula is arbitrarily detained, vilified and assaulted in an inner-city Melbourne police station. Toula remains defiant despite the ordeal. Analogous to Cheeni’s case, the police abuse becomes amplified due to Toula’s migrant outsider status and different sexual orientation. This intersectional identity-based infliction of police violence also appears in Oscar-winning Chilean film *A Fantastic Woman* (2017). A trans woman, Marina, is criminalised at first glance by police officers, who whisk her away to a police station on false suspicion of murder. Overall, interpellation, intersectionality and interpretation converge with the above films’ imagination of oppressed individuals challenging their oppressors.

Form, style and genre as interrogative instruments

The power of the moving image to amplify awareness, shape understanding, and influence interpretations of urban violence is significant. These pictures can expose the disjuncture between state policy and state practice. Spontaneous recording and transmission of police violence can have powerful repercussions. It was the harrowing real-time audio-visual footage of George Floyd’s execution by the Minneapolis police that spurred the Black Lives Matter movement’s call to resistance. Not only can witness videos play a pivotal role in establishing factual details of police shootings, they can influence policy changes such as the mandating of police car dashboard and body-worn cameras. Often, the ethos of immediacy and verisimilitude in citizen witness videos and live-capture news footage is integrated, stylised and expanded in documentary films, to create a contextual blend of backstory and violent event.

In Brazil, the live national television broadcast in 2000 of favela resident Sandro do Nascimento’s hijacking of a bus in Rio de Janeiro galvanised social attention to the dysfunctionality of the local police force. José Padilha’s *Bus 174* (2002) amalgamates a documentary approach with archive footage and interviews to

5 Special Rapporteur on Torture (2009), ‘Interim Report of the Special Rapporteur’, A/64/215 para 40. <https://www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/torture/rapporteur/docs/A-64-215.pdf>

hyperlink Nascimento's personal story and his eventual asphyxiation by police officers to the broader realities of socio-economic inequality in Brazil. Through this multiform narrative strategy, the film invites the viewer to experience multiple levels of marginalisation and oppression that interpellate Nascimento as a young black Brazilian and an embodiment of historical discourses relating to racial prejudice, police brutality and urban violence. Utilising flashback, a contextualising feature of the documentary genre in comparison with more synchronic and spontaneous citizen videos, the film reveals Nascimento as a survivor of the infamous 1993 Candelária police massacre of homeless children.⁶

A film parallel that recalls the bus as a trope for intersectional themes is Deepa Mehta's *Anatomy of Violence* (2016) about the gang rape and murder in 2012 of 23-year old Jyoti Singh on a moving bus in New Delhi. The film adopts the docufiction genre, utilising drama reconstruction in its attempt to interpellate the economically impoverished perpetrators whilst presenting a patchwork of multiple structural factors that contributed to their horrific act.⁷ The film frames this interpretative approach under the overarching catchphrase – 'no one becomes who they are in isolation'.

Acts of violence are not only the outcomes but also the symptoms of longstanding and deep-rooted structural and systemic malfunctions. An act of violence is often perceived in isolation as an aberrant occurrence bookended by an immediately linear timeline of formative factors. As exemplified by the Rio bus 174 and Delhi gang rape incidents, the act of violence is a connecting tissue or synapse in a complex assemblage of factors, determinants, powerholders, actors, ideologies and discourses.

A cinematic contextualisation of intersecting histories, structural and systemic factors spanning the prelude and aftermath of violent acts is also attempted in South African crime film *Gangster's Paradise: Jerusalema* (2008). The film follows the fortunes of Lucky Kunene, who transitions from callow carjacker to real estate overlord in the economically deprived Hillbrow district of Johannesburg. The film's focus on the police operation to arrest Lucky oscillates in time and space, spanning the anti-apartheid struggle, ghettoisation of black South Africans, and continued socio-economic segregation in post-apartheid South Africa, counter to the nation's new constitutional principles. The film's mise-en-scène and shifting locales reveal stark wealth disparities in different residential spaces, ranging from affluent, leafy, white-populated Sandton suburbs to the inner city decay of Hillbrow. Cinematic portrayal of spatial similarities, differences and specificities through location filming, cinematography and contrast editing is an important tool to reveal broader implications of state policies and policing in Johannesburg townships, Mumbai slums and Rio favelas.

In Brazilian action thriller *Tropa de Elite/ Elite Squad* (2007), André, a black military police officer-in-training, is compelled to perform an extrajudicial execution on a favela gangster involved in the death of his police partner. This state-sanctioned licence to kill becomes a baptism of fire for André who has endured institutional racism, rampant corruption, subordinating power relations and nepotism in the police force.

6 Amnesty.org. (2018), *Brazil: Police Killings Of Black Youths Continue, 25 Years After The Candelária Massacre*. [online] Available at: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/07/brazil-police-killings-of-black-youths-continue-25-years-after-the-candelaria-massacre/> [Accessed 6 July 2020].

7 A. Devasundaram and R. Barn (2020), 'Performativity of Rape Culture through Fact and Fiction: An Exploration of *India's Daughter* and *Anatomy of Violence*', *International Journal of Cultural Studies* Vol.23 No.6 pp. 879-897.

A sequence in *Noem My Skollie/Call Me Thief* (2016) blends biopic and crime drama genres to chart cycles of colonial violence etched into the South African national narrative and the apartheid-era prisons in which mixed race 'coloured' and black prisoners were incarcerated. Based on the memoirs of gang leader turned screenwriter John W. Fredericks, the film's central character AB Lonzi tells his fellow prisoners the tale of a slave, Themba, who leads an uprising against European farmers. Themba is eventually murdered and his lover Rachel and their child sold as slaves. Affirming the prisoners' own peripheralised identity as the offspring of white colonial exploitation, AB concludes his saga:

'And here we are sitting still. After 300 years, convicts, slaves, as our families struggle out there.'

As reflected in the above example, film can harness narrative form and performance to envoice hitherto silenced and marginalised individuals and communities and enable them to write back against systems that oppress them. Cinema then transforms into a canvas to paint dissenting or transgressive reinscriptions of dominant and subjugating renditions of history.

Tamil Indian film *Visaranai/Interrogation* (2016) also adapts a biographical literary source text to chart the true-life unwarranted arrest, detention and torture of four 'low-caste' Dalit migrant workers in South India. Like *Noem My Skollie*, *Visaranai* is inspired by an autobiographical account, that of Dalit autorickshaw driver M. Chandrakumar.⁸ Both Fredericks and Chandrakumar script their own stories on screen; writing is transformed into visual imaginations of resistance. In this way, cinema speaks to the cycles of police violence and the entitlement, impunity and absolute police power tangibilised across cross-national contexts.

This theme echoes in *Neighbouring Sounds* (2012), which features the ghosts of past crimes committed by Brazil's military dictatorship returning to haunt its perpetrators in the present. Urban regeneration and gentrification projects in which policing and securitisation are complicit can also perform violence on urban landscapes and social cohesion. In the film, a retired police commander who orchestrated a public massacre during the 1980s dictatorship receives his comeuppance when two of his security guards turn out to be incognito avengers. Such cinematic forms facilitate imagination of resistance and subversion onscreen, where they may not be possible in real life.

In terms of utilising film form and style to imagine collective social action, *Injustice* (2001) exposes the institutional racism in the UK police force. Tracking the quest for justice by victims' relatives, the film uses archive footage and interviews to investigate the theme presented as its expository title card – 'from 1969 to 1999 there were over 1000 deaths in police custody in the United Kingdom'. The documentary reveals the trauma inflicted on victims' relatives by categorical denial of justice. Only two police officers have ever been prosecuted successfully for manslaughter or custodial homicide in the UK. Using real life footage of violence, Ken Fero's contemporary follow-up film, *Ultraviolence* (2020) investigates, amongst other themes, the case of Brazilian Jean Charles de Menezes, shot and killed by police in a London Underground station. These cinematic cross-currents reveal the mobile and intersecting international contexts of urban police violence, providing as Fero asserts, 'a memory of those who cannot forget and a warning to those who refuse to see.'

8 M. Chandrakumar (2017). *Lock-Up: Jottings of an Ordinary Man* (Chennai: Tranquebar).

Dramatised film recreations of true incidents can evoke a historical sense of place and period and reimagine racialised national metanarratives whilst gesturing to contemporary reverberations of urban police violence. Steve McQueen's *Small Axe* (2020) BBC film series responds in this way to the protracted colonial and postcolonial timeline of institutional racism in the police force, where 'imperialism is turned inwards, used against outcasts, rebels and minorities residing in the imperial metropolis itself'.⁹ All the above-mentioned films, the voices and community mobilisations they imagine become potent symbols of resistance where constitutional and legal justice are denied or deferred indefinitely.

Conclusion

The diverse film forms cited in this article open up a window of opportunity to confront multidimensional aspects of urban violence. These visual texts not only bear witness but can also animate awareness, participatory, radical or reactionary responses. The concinnity of capturing and transmitting images to a global audience can open up sites of resistance, international solidarity and collective action. This synergy and symbiosis via the moving image also attest to the cross-pollination between interpellation, interpretation, intersectionality and imagination.

Filmed interpretations of urban violence have multimodal propensities to unveil and puncture chimerical constructions of dominant and hegemonic colonial histories. In the snapshots of police violence captured and shared by everyday citizens, the unadorned spontaneity of imperfect images can instantly implicate institutionally entrenched racialised practices across boundaries of Global South and North, whilst animating global solidarities as exemplified by Black Lives Matter. Fiction films, documentaries, TV and web series can be stylised, considered and contextual, presenting the 'broader picture', where form and style operate to inform, educate and unveil structures, systems and discursive bulwarks that undergird specific acts of police violence. Interrogative film portrayals also reveal how traces and residues of colonial brutality, antagonisms and depredations still persist in neo-colonial visitations of violence by instruments of the police and state.

Contrary to popular conception, an act of violence does not begin and end with the act per se. Violent acts have elaborate histories that continue to resonate in their aftermath. Moving images in multifarious forms can help diverse individuals, social groups, powerholders and policymakers ponder why urban violence occurs and what their role is in understanding and confronting it.

Interpretive audio-visual texts can also serve as a mirror of self-evaluation – a tool to educate the next generations about the broader histories of imperialism, race, slavery and pathologies of neo-colonialism that inflect modern police-related urban violence. This subject matter, now more crucially than ever, needs to take centre-stage in the British school and university curriculum.

9 C. Woodman (2020), *How British Police And Intelligence Are A Product Of The Imperial Boomerang Effect*. [online] Versobooks.com. Available at: <https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/4390-how-british-police-and-intelligence-are-a-product-of-the-imperial-boomerang-effect> [Accessed 6 December 2020].

Gendered urban violence against women and girls from the margins to the centre

Cathy McIlwaine

While urban violence may be disproportionately experienced among those living in cities that might be viewed as marginal within global imaginaries, and among those whose lives may be more actively marginalised, it is essential that we think of urban violence as integral to understanding how cities function. Yet while this need to centre urban violence as intrinsic to wider processes of urbanisation is certainly not a new idea, the recognition that gendered violence against women and girls is deeply embedded within how cities work is less widely acknowledged.¹ The emergence of urban violence as a major phenomenon in recent decades, especially in Latin American cities, has been accompanied by depictions of gangs and armed militias, drug trafficking, gun crimes and clashes with police and other security forces. These phenomena have entailed masculinised representations of the spectacle of urban violence that rarely mention or portray women.² This is partly because so much gendered violence occurs or is assumed to occur behind closed doors in the private sphere of the home and because it is normalised, tolerated, and invisibilised. Indeed, despite some important global policy commitments addressing violence against women in urban settings, such as the UN Women's (2017) *Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces* initiative, these tend to focus only on public spaces without linking to processes of urban violence more broadly.

Understanding the gendered nature of urban violence across interrelated multiple spheres in ways that acknowledge women and girls as survivors and/or bystanders who also deal with its ramifications, makes visible the working of both cities at the margins, and the marginalised within cities globally. Margins and centres can be viewed geographically in terms of divisions between and within different parts of the world, and conceptually, in terms of the neglect of certain groups of people.³ This short paper explores this in relation to gendered violence against women and girls in debates around urban violence. What appears empirically marginal might be conceptually more central to our understanding of the DNA of cities. This intervention calls for a more nuanced, multiscale analysis that situates gendered violence against women and girls in cities within a wider frame of the gendered processes of the urbanisation of violence that also uncover the structural underpinnings of intersecting forms of direct and indirect violence in cities.

1 C.O.N. Moser and C. McIlwaine (2014), 'Editorial: New Frontiers in Twenty-First Century Urban Conflict and Violence', *Environment and Urbanization*, Vol.26 No.1 pp.331-344; C.O.N. Moser and C. McIlwaine (2004), *Encounters with Violence in Latin America* (Routledge: London).

2 Wilding, P. (2014), 'Gendered meanings and everyday experiences of violence in urban Brazil', *Gender, Place and Culture*, Vol.21 No.2 pp.228-243.

3 See W. Mignolo (2002), 'The Enduring Enchantment (or the Epistemic Privilege of Modernity and where to go from Here)' *South Atlantic Quarterly* Vol.101 No.4 pp.927-95; hooks, b. (1984), *Feminist Theory: From Margins to Center* (South End Press: Boston).

From urban violence to the urbanisation of violence from a structural gendered perspective

With some exceptions,⁴ much research on urban violence tends to be gender-blind or implies that gender is a variable rather than a process embedded within complex relations of power. In turn, recent debates have highlighted how urban violence does not occur within the city ‘as a container’ but rather as a part of wider processes of capitalist and planetary urbanisation.⁵ While it is important to situate urban violence within structural transformations inside and beyond cities rather than as individualised phenomena devoid of context,⁶ explicit reference to the gendered nature of these dynamics is often absent. Perhaps this is related to the fact that until recently, many accounts of urbanisation have failed to develop a ‘gender lens’.⁷ This is all the more surprising given the demographic reality of feminised urban futures globally, where women will be the majority of urban citizens in years to come, with very high proportions of people living in households headed by women.

Women and men experience cities in different ways and consequently experience urban violence differently.⁸ Although young men, and especially poor men from marginalised backgrounds, are the main victims of urban violence and especially male homicides everywhere, it is worth remembering that 36 percent of women have experienced non-partner sexual violence or intimate partner violence (physical and/or sexual), and that it has been suggested that women are twice as likely to experience violence in cities, especially in the global South.⁹ These types of statistics are shockingly played out in specific cities such as Rio de Janeiro, where reports suggest that 17 women a day are victims of gender-based murder and sexual violence.¹⁰ In the Complexo da Maré, a large favela community in the city, more than three-quarters of women stated that violence against women occurred on a regular basis while 57 per cent stated they had experienced it personally.¹¹

Another key dimension of these debates relates to how indirect structural violence connected to poverty, inequality and exclusion underpins urbanised violence, yet once again gendered processes are often ignored or underplayed. Work on ‘infrastructural violence’, which highlights how processes of exclusion from urban infrastructure deepen marginalisation, often fails to mention women or gender despite calling out exploitation.¹² More recent work by feminist scholars has begun to address this, highlighting how lack of access to safe urban infrastructure is not only a form of violence in itself, but can also lead to further perpetration of direct violence against women and girls which is further mediated by other social identities.¹³ This relates to how the city evolves; how gendered violence against women and girls is more likely to occur when street lighting is inadequate, public transport insecure,

4 E.g. M. Hume (2009), *The Politics of Violence: Gender, Conflict and Community in El Salvador* (Wiley-Blackwell: Chichester); P. Wilding (2012), *Negotiating Boundaries: Gender, Violence and Transformation in Brazil* (Palgrave Macmillan: Basingstoke).

5 A. Pavoni and S. Tulumello (2020), ‘What Is Urban Violence?’, *Progress in Human Geography* Vol.44 No.1 pp.49–76.

6 D. Davis (2020), ‘City, Nation, Network: Shifting Territorialities of Sovereignty and Urban Violence in Latin America’, *Urban Planning*, Vol.5 No.3 pp.206–216.

7 S. Chant (2013), ‘Cities Through a “Gender Lens”: A Golden “Urban Age” for Women in the Global South?’, *Environment and Urbanization*, Vol.25 No.1 pp.9–29.

8 S. Chant and C. McIlwaine (2016), *Cities, Slums and Gender in the Global South* (Routledge: London).

9 C. McIlwaine (2013), ‘Urbanisation and gender-based violence: exploring the paradoxes in the Global South’, *Environment and Urbanization*, Vol.25 No.1 pp.65–79.

10 UN Women (2013), ‘In Rio de Janeiro’s favelas, a new online tool tackles violence against women and girls’: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2013/6/rio-de-janeiro-apps-to-end-violence-in-favelas>.

11 M. Krenzinger, E. Sousa Silva, C. McIlwaine and P. Heritage eds (2018), *Dores que Libertam: Falas de Mulheres das Favelas sa Mare, no Rio de Janeiro sobre Violencias* (Appris Editora, Rio de Janeiro).

12 D. Rodgers and B. O’Neill (2012), ‘Infrastructural Violence: Introduction to the Special Issue’, *Ethnography*, Vol.13 No.4 pp.401–412.

13 E.g. A. Datta and N. Ahmed (2020), ‘Intimate Infrastructures: The Rubrics of Gendered Safety and Urban Violence in Kerala, India’, *Geoforum*, Vol.110 pp.67–76.

or when they must wait for the cover of darkness in order to defecate at a distance from their homes due to socio-cultural norms of shame, even though they risk sexual attack.

Urban living can bring benefits for women in challenging more restrictive gender norms and providing economic opportunities, yet urbanisation can also create multiple demands and stresses on women's lives, especially among those residing in informal 'slum' communities, all of which can engender or contribute to gender-based violence.¹⁴ In this way, cities render wider configurations of gender inequalities and hierarchies visible.

The importance of including structural violence within interpretations of gendered violence is more established. Moving beyond Galtung's classic but gender-blind analysis of structural violence, the conceptualisation of 'multi-sided violence' has linked structural, symbolic and interpersonal violence in gendered ways across the Americas.¹⁵ Yet, it has been the horrific realities of 'femicide' and 'feminicide' in Latin America which have been integral in highlighting the interrelations between patriarchal and misogynistic norms and wider structural and institutional violence. The former relates to the intentional murder of women because they are women, and the latter to where the state is actively implicated in the murders through impunity, failing to prevent violence and the role of state officials in perpetrating the killings.¹⁶ Empirically, the most widely documented femicides and feminicides are associated with the city of Ciudad Juarez on the US-Mexican border, where four women are killed every day but where 98 percent of cases go unpunished.¹⁷ While the city is often referred to as a 'necropolis', femicides are not usually situated within empirical or conceptual interpretations of urban violence, but rather as occurring through processes of neoliberal capitalist development that exploit poor women from a poor country positioned within patriarchal structures of gender inequalities and 'disposable' workers in factories manufacturing for export or *maquilas*.¹⁸

Multiscalar urbanised violence against women and girls in, beyond and across the margins

Gendered urban violence is part of wider global linkages. Women's widespread transnational migration creates international divisions of reproductive labour where women from poor countries are exploited as domestics and care workers in cities of the global North. These divisions are linked with how urban inequalities are invariably shouldered by women, in terms of creating reproductive and productive survival mechanisms in situ and through mobility, which themselves generate violence.¹⁹ Many migrant women residing in cities of the global North report widespread direct and indirect gendered violence; in London, a recent study showed that 82 percent of Brazilian migrant women experienced some form of gender-based violence.²⁰ While it is easy to fall into the trap of envisioning cities of the global South

14 Chant and McIlwaine (2016).

15 P. Bourgois (2011), 'The Power of Violence in War and Peace: Post-Cold War Lessons from El Salvador', *Ethnography* Vol.2 No.1 pp.5-34; C. Menjivar (2011), *Enduring Violence: Ladina Women's Lives in Guatemala* (University of California Press: Berkeley).

16 P. Muñoz Cabrera (2010), *Intersecting Violences* (Central America Women's Network (CAWN): London).

17 M. Encarnación López (2018), *Femicide in Ciudad Juárez is enabled by the regulation of gender, justice, and production in Mexico*, *LSE Latin America and Caribbean Blog* (15 Feb 2018) (<https://www.npr.org/2020/01/26/799695694/activists-decry-femicides-after-another-woman-is-killed-in-ju-rez-mexico?t=1595938478068>).

18 M.W. Wright (2006), *Disposable Women and Other Myths of Global Capitalism* (Routledge: New York and London).

19 Bourgois (2001); Chant and McIlwaine (2016).

20 C. McIlwaine and Y. Evans (2020), 'A Transnational Spectrum of Urban Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG): perspectives from Brazilian women in London', *International Development Planning Review*, Vol.42 No.1 pp.93-112.

as inherently violent, gendered urban violence occurs everywhere and is linked through transnational movements of people, goods and capital.²¹

There is also theoretical value in thinking through synergies across borders to move beyond parochial notions of the ‘margins’ and to centre them within analyses of gendered urban violence. While Auyero has argued for the need to theorise across the Americas in order to understand the mechanisms underpinning the reproduction of urban relegation,²² others have focused on exploring the continuities and endurances among low-income and/or ethnic minorities experiencing multiple deprivations and the ‘devaluation of personhood’ in cities of the North in explicitly gendered terms.²³ There is therefore considerable potential to think more holistically around the urbanisation of violence in gendered and multiscale ways across multiple locations and boundaries. Following Katz, this might evoke a ‘countertopography’ of urban gendered violence where local specificities of power and inequalities are linked with wider global urbanisation processes in ways that can engender insurgent feminist change.²⁴

While a multiscale and countertopographical lens challenges the notion of urban margins and centres, it may also sustain a politics of transformation. Yet feminist transformation needs also to be sensitive to intersectionality. Indeed, it is important to recall that Crenshaw’s now classic conceptualisation of intersectionality, which delineates the multiple structures of oppression that subordinate women of colour and migrant women in the US along diverse identity categories, was initially conceived in relation to domestic violence and relates to ‘mapping the margins’.²⁵ Also pertinent is that she foregrounded the need to situate violence against women within structures and politics of discrimination and the ways in which states and political groupings bolster and uphold intersectional oppressions within and beyond the private sphere of the home. More recent analyses of intersectionality among Latin American feminists has emphasised the importance of hetero-patriarchal colonialist power structures that form the bedrock of theorising around violence against women.²⁶

The urban is rarely mentioned in these discussions of intersectionality and gendered violence, even though cities and urbanisation are at the apex of flows of power and control that undergird urban violence. Yet urban violence is inherently deeply intersectional. Different social groups in cities experience violence in different ways, from erroneous stereotypes of the young black men associated with gang and drug violence in Rio de Janeiro to the horrors of ‘corrective rape’ of black lesbian women in Cape Town or Johannesburg.²⁷

Although those most excluded in cities are most likely to experience violence, the fear of violence is engrained in cities and affects everyone living there, but especially women. It is women’s bodies which are disproportionately violated, occupied, commodified in cities across interconnected private, public and transnational fields, and as a result, they are less able to move around the city, meaning their right to mobility and well-being in the city is fundamentally compromised. Women’s bodies

21 Moser and McIlwaine (2014).

22 J.Auyero (2011), ‘Researching the urban margins: what can the United States learn from Latin America and vice versa?’ *City & Community* Vol.10 No.4.

23 Dominguez and Menjivar (2014: 193).

24 Katz, C. (2001), ‘On the Grounds of Globalization: A Topography for Feminist Political Engagement’, *Signs* Vol.26 No.4 pp.1213-234. Countertopography refers to the ways in which places and social and cultural relations and practices are interlinked across multiple scales, with a particular focus on foregrounding the neglected and invisible.

25 K. Crenshaw (1991), ‘Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color’, *Stanford Law Review* Vol.43 No.6 pp.1241-299.

26 M. Lugones (2007), ‘Heterosexualism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System’, *Hypatia*, Vol.22 No.1 pp.186-219; Muñoz Cabrera (2010).

27 D. Buiten and K. Naidoo (2016), ‘Framing the Problem of Rape in South Africa’, *Current Sociology*, Vol.64 No.4 pp.535-550.

are therefore at the apex of public and private spaces in cities.²⁸ Feminist scholars have increasingly turned to arts-based approaches such as body-map story-telling to explore how gendered violence is calibrated.²⁹ Such methods can reveal how gendered violence is enacted through the body in relation to wider socio-spatial and multiscalar processes, especially among groups who experience marginalisation. A recent verbatim theatre play, *Efêmera*, based on in-depth interviews with Brazilian women in London, developed a portrayal of Ana who retold her experiences of gendered violence back home in urban Brazil and in the UK to Joanne, a documentary film-maker. Ana's story entailed reflections on multiple incidents of intimate partner and wider institutional urban violence experienced by many of the women interviewed, and which were played out on stage through physical re-enactments of fights between Ana and Jo.³⁰ Such 'visceral' methods can arguably speak more clearly to the urgency of recognising gendered urban violence.

Conclusion

Although violence against women and girls is now fully recognised as a major global issue with some policy attention given to safe city initiatives, these tend to be examined in isolation from urban violence as a phenomenon and from wider structures of power across multiple city spaces. This is a missed opportunity to further appreciate and manage violence in cities everywhere. This short paper has suggested that this understanding of urban violence should entail much greater engagement across the borders and boundaries of different types of violence in ways that not only centre feminist analyses of violence, but also encompass a more holistic and multiscalar stance that challenges gendered urban violence as something that occurs on the 'margins' globally. Gendered urban violence is imbricated within processes of urbanisation globally in relation to the interplay of structural and symbolic matrices of power affecting all city dwellers in differentiated ways. Urban violence and gendered violence against women are not disconnected, individualised, or exceptional processes, but rather fundamentally interlinked, intersectional, embedded and embodied within the very being of cities.

28 A. Datta (2016), 'The Intimate City: Violence, Gender and Ordinary Life in Delhi Slums', *Urban Geography*, Vol.37 pp.323-342.

29 E.L. Sweet and S. Ortiz Escalante (2015), 'Bringing Bodies into Planning: Visceral Methods, Fear and Gender Violence', *Urban Studies*, Vol.52 No.10 pp.1826-1845.

30 See <https://gaellecornec1.wixsite.com/efemera>.

Stories make space for human dignity

Katharine E. Low

This article considers how the artistic intervention of performance-making as a public event can contribute to complicating the reporting of the felt and lived experience of living and working in an urban space that is characterised by experiences of physical and structural urban violence. Rather than accepting urban violence as the single narrative about a site, the discipline of socially-engaged theatre makes room for human dignity, considering and making space for individuals to give an account of how they live in this place. Through the process of performance-making, individuals are able to take space where they are seen as a person, rather than a mere statistic. In this paper I share how we, as a team of practitioners, Kat Low, Erica Lüttich, Phana Dube, Vusi Thwala, Gerard Bester, and Gabriel Vivas-Martínez, explored other ways of recording and listening to people's stories while working with residents of Hillbrow, South Africa, often described as a site of urban violence.¹ Our project explored digital storytelling as a means of celebrating underexposed narratives of living and working in Hillbrow, where through our collaborative practice, we challenged perceptions of a single narrative of urban violence associated with Hillbrow. Through our practice, we delineated a space where artistry and art-making disrupted both the stereotypes and the fixing of a space as a single limiting factor, in this case, the label of 'urban violence', and thus disrupting the dominant geopolitics of the space. We propose that by demarcating a space where different types of conversations can happen, where we can name and celebrate the joys and the everyday nature of people's lives, where the quotidian, the micro-dynamics of human existence matter, we demonstrate that dignity matters.

Urban violence is a slippery concept. The label of urban violence often comes with a list of statistics (homicides, gender-based violence etc), problems and root causes of violence experienced by a particular country and/or community.² However, Elsheshtawy notes how '(o)ur very understanding of the term depends on how it is employed and formulated among scholars; how regimes use the city as a strategic site for destruction and the spreading of terror; how urban planning as a discipline is complicit in furthering violent acts that displace, relocate and erase memory and history; how history contributes to the founding myths of oppressive regimes'.³ While the term 'urban violence' is often used to draw attention to a particular site in an attempt to resolve the detrimental context, I argue that used injudiciously it can result in a totalising and casual discourse which can neglect to acknowledge the existence of individual agency.

Discussing urban geopolitics, Fregonese notes the importance of finding better ways of acknowledging 'the quotidian, embodied, and micro-scale practices that shape urban politics and conflict'. She further argues that '[t]hese ordinary and often very subtle (at least to the outsider's eye) practices and geopolitically charged sites contribute to the production of micro-dynamics of tension and escalation that

1 See D. Vigneswaran (2020), 'Protection from Violence: Making Space Public in the Streets of Johannesburg', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol.46 No.3, pp.565-580 and F. Scorgie et al. (2017) 'From fear to resilience: adolescents' experiences of violence in inner-city Johannesburg, South Africa', *BMC Public Health*, Vol.17(Suppl. 3) No.441, pp.51-64.

2 C.f. World Bank (2016). *Urban Violence: A Challenge of Epidemic Proportions*. [online] <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2016/09/06/urban-violence-a-challenge-of-epidemic-proportions>.

3 Y. Elsheshtawy (2014), 'Urban Violence,' *Built Environment* Vol.40 No.3, pp.311-313.

... connect individual daily fears and experiences of violence to wider geopolitical struggles;⁴ Accounting for the incidents of urban violence is not solely to recognise threats of physical, emotional or psychological violence; it is also about making space to acknowledge how the existence of such violence permeates everyday life, the micro-dynamics of human existence: holding hands, making food, dreaming, walking home. Thus, the concept of urban violence does not invite a full appreciation of the lived experience of people who reside in such defined settings or acknowledge their geopolitical struggles. The placing of the label of 'urban violence' on a place where an individual, lives reduces that individual to a particular narrative, a reduction of their lived space, which I argue is an affront to human dignity.

The label of urban violence

As Pavoni and Tulumello point out, 'the absence of an agreed definition of urban violence',⁵ and the 'oscillation' between the individual concepts of 'urban' and 'violence' has resulted in 'either using urban violence as a simple (and redundant) shorthand for violence in the city, and/or crystallising the urban as a sort of a-historical condition, naturally conducive to violence, which is accordingly described via the extensive use of (reductive) statistics (e.g. murder rates).'⁶ An idea which perhaps demonstrates the concept's underlying fallacy. Definitions and views of urban violence are regularly refuted by scholars who argue for more complex and granular understandings of the impact of the concept.⁷ Yet, it remains a shorthand term for governments, NGOs and policy makers to describe a troubling area, but, I argue, doing so is reductive, patronising and an affront to human dignity. We should not be reducing this discourse to an abbreviated label. These situations, events and places are messy and complicated, and our accounts of them should be equally so.

Pavoni and Tulumello offer a useful frame through which to understand the affect of the term urban violence, moving away from the view of 'the urban as the passive container in which [violence] occurs, but rather understanding it both as the *background* out of which violence becomes manifest as an event, as well as the *process* constitutive to violence itself.'⁸ Once we understand and acknowledge this, it becomes clearer how much more complicated the lived experiences in these settings are. I contend that socially-engaged performance can reveal what the multiplicities of people's lives look like. This understanding is articulated in Elsheshtawy's argument for seeing the term 'urban violence' as needing to move beyond 'disciplinary boundaries, pointing to the importance of collaboration, and sharing insights to provide meaningful solutions to one of the most critical concerns of contemporary urbanism'.⁹

Discussing how violence is defined and experienced is problematic, in that it is easy to see violence and sense its presence, but there is a less palpable aspect to violence that is harder to define, namely the affective experience of violence or threat of violence. Farmer defines structural violence as 'a host of offensives against human dignity' which includes all forms of inequality such as gender and social

4 S. Fregonese (2017), 'Affective atmospheres, urban geopolitics and conflict (de)escalation in Beirut.' *Political Geography* Vol.61 No.1 pp.1-10.

5 A. Pavoni and S. Tulumello (2020), 'What is urban violence?,' *Progress in Human Geography* Vol.44 No.1 pp.49-76, p.49.

6 Ibid. p.50.

7 The concept of urban violence is described at times as 'merely descriptive or reductive' (Pavoni and Tulumello, 'What is urban violence?' p.53), while Elsheshtawy notes how 'Urban violence as a construct clearly has political overtones' ('Urban Violence', p.311). See Y. Pedrazzini et al. (2014), 'Violence of Urbanization, Poor Neighbourhoods and Large-Scale Projects: Lessons from Addis Ababa, Ethiopia', *Built Environment*, Vol.40 No.3, pp.394-407 and D. E. Davis (2014), 'Modernist Planning and the Foundations of Urban Violence in Latin America', *Built Environment* Vol.40 No.3, pp.376-393 for further consideration of this concept.

8 Pavoni and Tulumello, 'What is urban violence?' p.51.

9 Elsheshtawy, 'Urban Violence', p.311.

inequality, human rights abuses and extreme and relative poverty.¹⁰ I extend this idea and argue that the label of urban violence erodes human dignity because it does not take into account the agency of individuals who live in these settings; they are not solely defined by the urban violence of the site in which they live. Here, urban violence is too often employed as a totalising discourse which limits or refutes the idea of individual agency, which in turn has an impact on that individual's sense of wellbeing. Ramphele has long argued that South Africans still bear the wounds of the past brutal oppression and calls for the need to create spaces in which people are able to address these wounds. Her thesis is that when people recover their dignity, they begin to look after themselves.¹¹ Specifically, Ramphele draws attention to how the act of acknowledging and being acknowledged can impact a person's sense of wellbeing and dignity.

The urban violence label fixes people, locks them in a particular site and implies that they have no agency, when actually we know that people have agency in many different forms. A label of urban violence is a reductive, patronising term, which reduces individuals to one particular narrative, an act which erodes dignity.

Stories of Hillbrow: *Extraordinary, Ordinary Women* (2019)

Within a South African context, and often a global context, Hillbrow is regularly described as a locus of urban, state and structural violence.¹² However, reporting on the violence experienced in Hillbrow neglects to pay attention to the micro-dynamics of the felt experiences of women and young people, whose everyday lives are not solely about living alongside violence. This is where performance making can play a key role.

Stories make space and through the act of performance-making and exploration, stories shift, discover, and uncover. The artistic process helps elaborate the single stories heard about particular sites, making space to talk about questions or concerns which have been ignored. For example, in our project, we realised how rarely we heard the stories of women, especially older women living, working, and dreaming in Hillbrow. Thus, in collaboration with facilitators from Outreach Foundation, we focused on stories of extraordinary, ordinary women living and working in Hillbrow. We worked with groups of young people and existing community support organisations to select a number of stories from the nominations which they provided, develop storyboards and film and edit these narratives as a collective. The films were premiered at a free public event we hosted entitled: *Stories of Hillbrow – More than a Single Story*. Alongside the films, there were performances building on our partnerships with the local health clinic and an elder care home and an independently chaired conversation with the community about ways of shifting narratives about Hillbrow before culminating in a shared meal for 350 people.

The performance art project intended to begin a conversation about how we shift the narrative of living and being and working in Hillbrow by complicating the existing representations of what it means to live there, but also to problematise the outsider gaze of Hillbrow. We acknowledged the pervasive nature of the violence of the city,

10 P. Farmer (2005), *Pathologies of Power: Health, Human Rights, and the New War on the Poor* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press), p.8.

11 M. Ramphele (2012), 'Walking over the wounded'. *Mail & Guardian*, June 28, [online]. From: <http://mg.co.za/article/2012-06-21-er-the-wounded> [Accessed on July 5, 2012].

12 E.g. Al Jazeera (2019), 'One killed, five wounded in new Johannesburg violence'. *Al Jazeera*, September 8 [online]. From: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/09/killed-wounded-johannesburg-violence-190908191858658.html> Njilo, N (2019). 'Five killed, 189 arrested so far in Joburg violence: SAPS'. *TimesLIVE*, September 3 [online]. From: <https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/south-africa/2019-09-03-five-killed-189-arrested-so-far-in-joburg-violence-saps/> and Webster, D. 2019. 'Xenophobic "shutdowns" turn indiscriminately violent.' *New Frame*, September 3 [online]. From: <https://www.newframe.com/xenophobic-shutdowns-turn-indiscriminately-violent/>

as well as the perception of that violence against the real, visible acts of violence that our participants and our co-researchers had experienced, witnessed or heard about. We also recognised and noted how the precarity of people's lives living amongst urban violence is much more complex than is currently reported. The telling of different narratives by co-creating in a theatre-making space revealed layers of lived lives which the performance-making enabled. This type of performance-making is innovative as it allows for stories to be noticed, shared, and given attention, lending dignity which in turn disrupts the silencing and neglect of the urban violence context in which they live, work and dream.

Socially-engaged performance makes space

Fundamentally, socially-engaged performance can create space for personhood, where the practice elevates the everyday stories of individuals – it makes space for the quotidian. In doing so, the performance-making legitimises those micro-dynamics and felt experiences. Making art in sites experiencing structural and urban violence allows us to begin to re-shift particular atmospheres and narratives of those sites. As a discipline, socially-engaged performance helps us interpret the stories and thus create new knowledge, as the materiality of the city is data for stories; our discipline also helps us read the data. The artistic endeavours take notice of particular lived and felt experiences; the process is another means of making legible the experience of the city to both those who reside in it and those outside.

Socially-engaged performance allows for different holdings of space for the participant groups, through which different explorations and understandings of the site can be re-imagined or recreated. For example, in 2018 we invited the young people we were working with at the Outreach Foundation to imagine their ideal adolescent sexual health clinic. They created a 3-D map¹³ of that clinic, where audience members were taken through the experience of what young people want in terms of their sexual health needs. These performative mappings of space allowed for exploration of different experiences of a place, a means of understanding each other's connotations, viewing needs from different perspectives.

Through performance we are able to play with the malleability of space,¹⁴ whereby spaces can co-exist and co-create. The artistic endeavour allows individuals to take space, to hold space, to consider how spaces can coexist and to create new spaces. Creating physical, performative re-imaginings of particular spaces are important for exploring what happens in the spaces and understanding interactions between each other and the space. For example, while working with young people in Nyanga, a township in Cape Town, we built on Lefebvre's *rhythmanalysis*¹⁵ and recreated the streets and sites where the young people felt safe and unsafe in order to explore the order and the rhythms of Nyanga, to consider how space is produced by asking questions about what is being made around us, and acknowledging the impact of the cacophony of space¹⁶ on individuals' agency and lived experience. The impetus in this framing was to explore understandings about how and what felt safe sexually for young people living in Nyanga, a site of regular urban violence, especially gender-based violence, thereby developing new knowledges and agency in a particular setting, and legitimising those existing felt experiences to share with each other and be heard.

13 See: <https://katharinelow.com/digital/36-outreach-foundation-collaborations>.

14 See D. Massey (2005), *For Space* (London: Sage).

15 H. Lefebvre (2004) *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time, and Everyday Life*. Translated by S. Elden and G. Moore. (London and New York: Continuum).

16 See K.E. Low (2020), *Applied Theatre and Sexual Health Communication: Apertures of Possibility* (London: Palgrave Macmillan).

Ways of working

Artistic endeavours are also about legibility and access. Through performance and hosting of creative events and spaces, the micro-dynamics of those living in the urban sites are felt and experienced because there is exchange and dialogue. As recipients of those performed stories, the audience are not being told or shown, rather those stories are experienced, felt and debated. It is a taking up and making of space – the atmosphere shifts. Such dialogues begin to break the repetitive patterns or tropes of what it means to live and work in Hillbrow.

It remains important to make and take space through art making in sites described as experiencing structural and urban violence. Performance-making shifts and complicates atmospheres; it directs attention to the felt experiences of living and working in a particular place. The artistic endeavours help spaces become habitats. Habitat is defined here in the sense of a space of comfort, trust, exploration, and celebration. These habitats may begin a shift in the affective atmospheres of those spaces. An atmosphere lingers. It is, as Anderson describes it, 'a form of envelopment'.¹⁷ Anderson speaks of 'affective atmospheres', asking 'how to attend to collective affects that are not reducible to the individual bodies that they emerge from?'¹⁸ and it is in this moment that the art-making, socially-engaged performance is key. To return to the *Extraordinary, Ordinary Women* project, the public event shifted the atmosphere that day to one of celebration and activism. The flags, the art installation of the names of all the everyday heroes, the screenings of the films and the performances and dancing left an impression on the walls and in the air. Memories linger in the space but they may also be transported by participants to other spheres. Performance in particular sites about the experiences of living in those sites can shift existing atmospheres. Specifically, performance-making can make and take up space in which to express and record these micro-dynamics, becoming an innovative means to acknowledge the multiplicity of the people who inhabit these spaces.

The act of the big, open public event, a celebration and sharing of the performance practice created, has a profound impact on those involved. It draws full attention to a particular question and may produce or provoke further reflection and thought. It is a reinforcement of an individual's personhood. It is not a discussion of geopolitics, but a focus on the little stories, the seemingly insignificant; they are noted as being worth something because there is a focus and emphasis on personhood. At times, it feels revolutionary to ask the question 'what is the story you want to tell?' By paying attention to stories which have not been listened to before, the site becomes something else. Crucially, it is not escapism; it is about taking of space for the individual to be seen as they wish to be seen in that particular moment in time. The socially-engaged performance is not being done for 'change' or improvement of a particular participant group or community. Rather it is about space for participants and communities to articulate their own narratives through which human dignity can be upheld.

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B. Anderson (2009) 'Affective Atmospheres.' *Emotion, Space and Society* Vol.2 No.2, pp.77–81, p.80.
Ibid.

Conclusion

Socially-engaged performance involves particular, innovative ways of working where the ethics of the practice are carefully considered throughout the project. Working in such a way is fundamentally dependent on the relationships built between the participants, co-collaborators and co-researchers. The creative conversations and exploration emerge from spaces in which trust has been established. Working in a way that moves beyond particular narratives and obvious stereotypes, is about being open, paying attention, offering non-judgmental listening in the co-making of the work. This practice is about acknowledging the positionality of all involved, the different types of experiences and perceptions laid upon people, their bodies and their experiences and perhaps most importantly the consequences this may have for the people who reside in such places, making space for human dignity.

Knife works: contesting narratives of knife crime in Britain

Charlotte Brunsdon

'I go into schools to talk about the realities of knife violence...The most common question I get asked by pupils is: is there a safe place to stab someone?'
Dr Martin Griffiths¹

British news media in 2018-9 were much occupied with London's 'epidemic of knife crime' in which young men and children – many of them black – were dying on city streets.² A&E consultants gave interviews about having to learn skills more suitable to warzones, explaining that their medical school training had not prepared them for stab and gunshot wounds in which massive blood loss was the most common cause of death.³ Journalists wrote think pieces about families left behind, welfare cuts or gang culture. British television showed dramas such as *Top Boy* in which black criminality functions as a sign of the drama's authenticity.⁴ After headlines about gang violence at screenings the film *Blue Story* was temporarily withdrawn from cinemas in November 2019, even though, as its director Rapman (Andrew Onwubolu) insisted, its message was anti-violence.⁵

There is evidently research to be done which tracks the contours of these recent media narratives, particularly bearing in mind Critcher's observation, from a brief survey of March 2019 press coverage of knife crime, that race was 'everywhere and nowhere' in the reports.⁶ Britain has a long history of slashing and stabbing. Writing in 1977, McIlvanney evokes the volatile atmosphere of a Glasgow pub in the 1970s as 'the resort of men who hadn't much beyond a sense of themselves and weren't inclined to have that sense diminished.'⁷ This hyper-masculine environment in which violence can be triggered by the slightest of misjudgements or trespasses is immediately recognisable from more recent knife-and-gun crime narratives, and some of these continuities could usefully be explored.

I pursue these questions in a different way by suggesting that scholarly approaches to 'knife crime' can be augmented by attention to artworks which respond to Britain's dangerous city streets. Such works give glimpses of the compulsions which drive involvement in what participants recognise as destructive scenarios, as well as gesturing to the structural and institutional factors which make escape so difficult. They also engage with the fear, the anxiety, the anger, the loss, the mourning. The classic trope of many film and television gang narratives, the precious young son or brother who the loving parent/sibling wishes to shield, and the painfully inevitable outcome, can be read as both an acute understanding of the pressures

1 'Surgeon's view: stabbing victims are getting younger and their wounds worse', *Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/nov/06/stabbing-victims-look-scared-theyve-never-seen-their-blood-spilt> [Accessed 25 June 2020].
2 See G. Younge (2018), 'The radical lessons of a year reporting on knife crime', *Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/membership/2018/jun/21/radical-lessons-knife-crime-beyond-the-blade> and Behavioural Insights Team (2020) *Violence in London: what we know and how to respond*, https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/bit_london_violence_reduction_final_28_january_2020.pdf
3 L. Donnelly (2019), 'NHS to send surgeons into schools to combat knife crime epidemic', *Telegraph*, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2019/06/19/nhs-send-surgeons-schools/> [Accessed 25 June 2020].
4 See S. Malik and C.J. Nwonka (2017), 'Top Boy: Cultural verisimilitude and the allure of black criminality for UK Public Service Broadcasting drama', *Journal of British Cinema and Television* Vol.14 No.4 pp.423-444.
5 See C.J.Nwonka (forthcoming 2022), *Black Boys: The Aesthetic of British Urban Film* (London: Bloomsbury).
6 C. Critcher (2019), 'What is the meaning of this: one month of knife crime in the national press', paper to symposium, 'Stuart Hall's Archive', University of Birmingham, 2 July.
7 W. McIlvanney (2013 [1977]), *Laidlaw* (Edinburgh: Canongate), p.115.

of masculinity in particular environments, and a cry for help. The three artworks discussed below are not genre narratives of this type, but each offers a sense of what it is to live in violence and engages differently with the distinction sociologists make between structure and agency, putting the short violence of a stabbing within a longer context. These artworks address overlapping and differentiated audiences, soliciting engagement, in contexts such as art galleries, civic squares and music festivals, with the habitual, everyday employment of knives in British streets. Together they testify to an emotionally resonant and complex, symptomatic apprehension of ‘knife crime’.

The Same Road is a Different Road

Penny Woolcock’s short film set in London, *The Same Road is a Different Road* (2018), returns to questions of urban violence that she explored with the 2009 grime musical, *1 Day*, set in Birmingham.⁸ This earlier film led to an unanticipated follow-up, *One Mile Away* (2012) which documented – and enacted – attempts to broker a truce between two Birmingham ‘postcode gangs’, the Johnson Crew (from Aston) and the Burger Bar Boys in Handsworth. *One Mile Away* began after one of the participants contacted Woolcock, ‘and asked whether I would help him [to broker a truce], because I was the only person he knew who wasn’t police and knew people on both sides. And I very naively thought “yes”’.⁹ The film was noteworthy for Woolcock’s recognition that she was engaged in a project which demanded different ethical priorities: ‘In every other filmmaking experience the film is paramount. In this case I felt the truce was paramount...’.¹⁰ She does not subordinate the lives she depicts to her own film-making, and thus demonstrates that she is trustworthy, which, in turn, results in a remarkable film about perilous masculinity.

In *The Same Road is a Different Road*, Woolcock’s attention moves away from the engaging individuals of the Birmingham films to questions of territory and (in)visibility. No protagonists are shown and the footage is mainly of pavements near where she lives in London, with a commentary alternating between two residents. It explores how the same mile of streets in Islington, is different, depending on who is walking.¹¹ Woolcock, a middle-class white woman, understands one distinctive feature to be the corner shop where she buys ‘deliciously salty olives’. The working-class black sixteen-year-old whose voice alternates with hers explains the significant features of the same streets quite differently. It’s not about olives. For him, as for the participants in the Birmingham films, the streets demand constant vigilance, for to be ‘caught slipping’ may mean death.

Woolcock’s Birmingham work had led her to ask ‘What does it even mean to say someone is in a gang?’ ‘First of all here is what it is not. It is not an organised group that you apply to join and go through some kind of ritual in order to be accepted as a member.’ Instead, she points to the postcode lottery of deprivation, well recognised by participants – ‘it’s just streets’. Woolcock continues, ‘If you are a young man from a certain community, born in a certain area, you are affiliated to that gang whether you choose it or not. ...if you are male between twelve and about forty you take your life into your hands by leaving your area, even if you have never picked up a weapon, ever said anything provocative and don’t want to be involved with the *beef*.’ Woolcock’s unnamed guide in *Same Road* points out boundaries between home and

8 P. Woolcock, *Fantastic Cities*, Museum of Modern Art, 17 November 2018 – 3 March 2019.

9 A. Clarke (2013; updated April 12 2018), ‘Penny Woolcock talks to gangsters’, *Sight and Sound*, www.bfi.org.uk/news-opinion/sight-sound-magazine/penny-woolcock-talks-gangsters. [Accessed 3 June 2020].

10 Woolcock details the origins and making of the film on her website, from which this and all quotations in the following paragraph are taken. www.pennywoolcock.com/onemileaway [Accessed 3 June 2020].

11 P. Woolcock and S. Griffith (2018), ‘The city as a warzone’ in Claire Armitstead, *Tales of Two Londons* (London: OR Books), pp.57-68.

alien territories, and how he must decide whether he should travel through a hostile patch by bus, or whether the risk of being trapped on a bus by a rival crew makes this the more dangerous option. Neither speaker is ever seen; we see only images of the streets through which they walk, describing the significance of landmarks and boundaries for each.

Woolcock's film situates the street deaths of children and young men as the moments of wider visibility of these lives. That moment of death, that body on the street, brings different urban geographies together on the same road. *Same Road is a Different Road* addresses directly the way in which 'our cities are carved up into little warzones and the rest of us are oblivious as we walk across frontlines that are deadly for these boys.'

The Knife Angel

Knife Angel is a twenty-foot sculpture made from 100,000 recycled street knives. Starting outside Liverpool Cathedral in 2018, it has toured the country since. My observations are drawn from its 2019 Birmingham residency in Victoria Square.¹² There were always people standing round it, discussing it. Because the angel is so big, it seems at first glance like a guardian angel for those standing beneath it. However, this angel reaches its hands out in supplication.



The Knife Angel in Victoria Square Birmingham 2019.

The Angel was conceived as a 'national monument against violence and aggression' 'to bring about social change' and was made of weapons collected from two hundred knife banks organised with the police, often during local knife amnesties.¹³ The knives were blunted and disinfected, and families bereaved by knife violence were encouraged to engrave messages on blades. Knife Angel has proved a powerful, participatory work which attracts audiences wherever it visits, as well as having a substantial virtual presence. The wings in particular, which are made only of blades in brilliant realisation as feathers, embody the transcendent ambitions of the work, particularly to Christians. Death blade to angel wing.

This is work which has spoken to a wide public, but which is particularly addressed to young knife carriers through its slogan 'Save a Life, Surrender Your Knife'. The loss which the Angel embodies can

be remembered and assuaged by individuals surrendering their knives. It is easy to criticise this work for apparently understanding knife crime as the unconnected acts of individuals ('surrender *your* knife'). However, the British Ironwork Centre recognised that there are structural issues underlying the increase in street knife crime in their account of the making of the statue: 'both our government and our educational system need to accept there's far more to be done'. While it is indeed individuals who commit stabbings, they do so in particular contexts and circumstances which this work and its key slogan do not address (although the Angel itself is seen by its makers as only one part of their campaign). Communities wishing to host the Angel are required to commit to using it as a 'point of tuition to

¹² The Knife Angel was in Birmingham in February 2019. Its British tour was interrupted by the spring 2020 Covid 19 lockdown when it stayed in Telford. A full list of locations can be found at www.britishironworkcentre.co.uk. [Accessed 14 June 2020].

¹³ www.britishironworkcentre.co.uk. All subsequent quotations about the making, touring and aim of the Knife Angel are taken from this site.

educate their community youth about the negative effects of violent and aggressive behaviour'. This emphasis on effects – and the mourning embodied by the Angel – needs complementing. Is the place to start with the individual carrying the knife, without enquiring further into why that child feels the need to carry a knife? Austerity cuts to policing are significant, but so is the history of police racism which means that the police are not a feasible protective resource for black youth.

Stormzy/Glastonbury

The concluding artwork persists as a widely circulated set of images from the set at the 2019 Glastonbury Festival performed by British grime artist Stormzy. I will touch on only one aspect, which is Stormzy's wearing of a Banksy-designed Union Jack stab-proof vest. The image of Stormzy – a big, black man dominating the main Glastonbury stage with this national symbol on his chest – was used to illustrate nearly all reviews of the show, from the *Daily Telegraph* to CNN, and I want to examine why it proved so irresistible to picture editors.¹⁴

Barthes famously analysed a *Paris Match* cover showing a saluting black soldier in French uniform, 'his eyes uplifted, probably fixed on a fold of the tricolour', to explore the complex heritage of empire condensed within the image.¹⁵ National flags and the histories of colonisation are a potent combination. Gilroy's first book, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*, addressed the amnesia clouding ideas of British culture when it comes to Empire, and this image of Stormzy touches all these nerves. It is an image both magnificent, and, to some audiences, almost impossible. What did the readers of the *Telegraph* or the *Daily Mail* – right of centre British newspapers which are characterised by a constant low-grade inferential racism – make of it?¹⁶ It is magnificent because it embodies a long political struggle for British-born citizens of imperial heritage to be recognised as British. However, the flag is distressed, its traditional colour palette only residually present as red, white – and black.

¹⁴ The search terms 'Stormzy+Glastonbury' will generate any number of versions of this image.

¹⁵ R. Barthes (1972 [1957]), 'Myth today,' in *Mythologies* translated by Annette Lavers (London: Jonathan Cape), p.116.

¹⁶ N. McCormick (2019), 'Stormzy review, Pyramid Stage, Glastonbury: a historic performance that tore down barriers and moved souls', *The Telegraph*, 29 June (telegraph.co.uk, accessed 16 June 2020).

It is recognisably the Union Jack, but in some way traumatised, with drips running between the stripes. Perhaps this is the blood always concealed in a national flag, perhaps this is the blood of the young men dying on the British streets, for this etiolated flag appears painted, like a target, on a defensive garment, a stab-proof vest, and the set as whole directly addressed the deaths and incarceration of young black men.

The impossibility of the image – its magnificence – lies in its challenge to myths of nationhood which construct Britishness as white, the island nation as impervious to its own imperial depredations. Stormzy here does not represent his country, in the way in which British athletes such as Mo Farah (of Somalian origin), or Linford Christie (Jamaican-born) have carried the Union Jack after successful races. He does something more arresting – he challenges it. He both claims Britishness and embodies the danger of this claim for a black British man. You need a stab-proof vest. It is not the triumph of a race well run but the invocation of structures of disadvantage and obstacles to be overcome. But, of course, it is also a triumph – headlining a huge event, performing in front of thousands.

In conclusion

These are different types of work addressed to audiences in contrasting spaces. The Knife Angel toured public squares in Britain, available to the glance of any passer-by. Its street presence, resonant with loss, connects it with the murals of remembrance made at the local sites of individual deaths. Its message of knife-renunciation may, however, be rather too simple for these bereaved mural-makers, for whom, as Griffith puts it, ‘Walking around with a knife is the same as carrying a mobile phone, for many of these young people, it’s part of the kit’.¹⁷ Woolcock’s *Same Road* was shown on a large screen in an Oxford art gallery. Played on a loop in a white-walled empty space, the continuous images of pavements and bus stops and street furniture, are, in that context, most easily identified to the casual glance as avant-garde time-based work, probably about walking and cities. It is the soundtrack which exploits the museum visitor’s likely familiarity with delicacies such as olives to demonstrate that there is more than one road shown in these images. This work in this space challenges what will be a mainly white audience to consider the structures which make these other city dwellers invisible to them except at moments of rupture such as robbery or death. As Woolcock notes, ‘if white middle-class kids were killing each other on the streets of London, we would see them very clearly’.¹⁸

When Stormzy played Glastonbury, many of his audience were people who would be comfortable in art galleries and espouse progressive politics. There is a long history of white aspiration to the cool of black culture. Stormzy’s set, his costume, though, made a different move, a claim to entitlement. Not to be a resource for the hegemonic culture to sharpen up its act, or a visitor brought in to entertain, but – broadcast on the BBC – an insistence that this too is Britain. His use of statistics about prison and ethnicity as a backdrop made an argument about structural, institutional racism. The vest asserts that this is happening to British citizens now, and the flag gestures to a longer imperial history that is the remote cause.

Most street deaths are the actions of a moment – the short violence which makes headlines. These works, while responding to this short violence, invoke, in different ways, what could be called the long violence of the structural and institutional

17 Woolcock and Griffith, ‘The city as a warzone’, p.65.

18 Ibid, p.67.

contexts of racism: reduction of youth services, poor education, insecure employment, bad housing, etc. Attention to this long violence – in articulation, in some cases, with the particular entrepreneurial demands of the drug trade – refigures these deaths on the streets not as incomprehensible gang warfare, but as the moments of shocking visibility in which young people die, at each other's hands, as the consequence of policy and institutional decisions a long way from their postcodes.

Experiencing urban violence: cities, sensory regimes and dis-orders

Alana Osbourne

Early last summer, a few friends and I decided to escape the humdrum of the city to spend a morning walking through the Forêt de Soignes – the large forested park that borders the south of Brussels. We had packed a lunch, and around noon we started looking for a comfortable bench, tree trunk, or flat surface to sit on and eat. We came across a wide stone ring, rising from the ground up to knee-height. The installation was surrounded by 30 frail young trees and filled with overgrown shrubs. We sat on the smooth grey stone, unpacked our food and ate whilst cautioning the children to stay away from the nettles. As we left our makeshift lunch spot, we saw a sign indicating that the stone circle we had just sat on was in fact a commemorative structure dedicated to the victims of the 2016 attacks. That year, on the morning of March 22nd, two bombs exploded in Brussels, one destroying part of the international airport terminal and the other detonating in a train carriage at an underground station during peak rush hour, killing 30 people and wounding many more. For obvious reasons, this spectacularly violent event affected Brussels and its residents, etching itself in the city's collective memory. Three years later, walking away from the unkempt memorial, slightly embarrassed for our desecration of it by way of picnic, we reflected on how the city now seemed to have almost recovered. The effects of the bombings which had lingered on for years, influencing how we navigated and felt the urban landscape, were finally wearing off. In recalling this event, we started to enumerate the ways in which we had experienced this violence. We detailed the sights, sounds and smells that had become commonplace in the immediate aftermath of the bombings, from the increased military presence in the streets of Brussels, the frequent wails of police sirens as houses and neighbourhoods were searched, to the almost clean smelling carriages of underground trains which remained deserted months after the explosions. We were mostly able to enumerate these sensory regimes of urban violence – or the interactions of sights, sounds and smells that were evocative of recent and potentially impending turmoil – now that we could compare them to the renewed sensory order of a city 'more at peace'.

In many urban contexts, crime, political violence, conflicts and insecurity play a large role in residents' involvement with their environment. While concerned with socio-economic inequities and urban violence at large, I am interested in the effect they have on embodied experiences of everyday city life. This entails looking at practices that are connected to sensory perception and atmospheric attunement, including the ability to recognise sights, smells and sounds that mark a place as dangerous. In this short reflection piece, I develop this interest by referring to the questions elicited by that morning walk in the forest. What amalgamations of smell, taste, touch and so on, work as signifiers of danger? Or, in other words, how do people feel exposed to – or protected from – harm? How might we apprehend the sensorial cityscapes through which violence and insecurity are experienced, indexed and governed? Departing from these questions I suggest that research on the sensorial is especially useful for investigating how city dwellers work through changes in urban landscapes of (in)security. With attention to the sensory (dis)orders of the city, I advance that an embodied emphasis can add to how we understand and analyse the spatial thresholds and signifiers of urban violence.

The senses and the city

Cities and their neighbourhoods offer varying combinations of physical stimuli. This sensory input, while often described in terms of sound, visions, taste, smell and touch, extends beyond the five senses often privileged in Western thought to include corporeal experiences of balance, movement (or proprioception), temperature, and temporality, among others. The grounds, walls and skylines we navigate and their correlation with the bodily rhythms that pace our movements shape our experiences of city life. Everyday urban flows are influenced by our ability to steer through crowds, balance along cobbled pavements or uneven sidewalks. We are jostled about on buses, pressed up against other commuters in screeching underground trains, or cooped up in the muffled air of private vehicles. We retain impressions of our bodily heat in relation to external temperatures as we amble along streets rich in visual markers – architectural designs, signage, advertisements – and olfactory stimuli, in which the exhaust fumes of heavy traffic mingle with the smells of air fresheners, food, waste and bodily odours. From these various sensory interactions specific affective responses emerge, such as unease, pleasure, familiarity or revulsion, in patterns that change as the city unfurls.

For urban studies scholars who have focused on the senses – for example, vision,¹ sound,² smell³ or taste⁴ – the spatial order of the urban is first and foremost a sensory order. ‘The senses mediate the relationship between self and society, mind and body, idea and object. *The senses are everywhere*. Thus, sensation (as opposed to but inclusive of representations in different media) is fundamental to our experience of reality...’⁵ The culturally informed ways through which we give meaning to these inputs and arrange them into recognisable patterns – or *sensory regimes* – shape our affective accounts and cognitive understandings of cities. When an assemblage of interconnected sensory experiences is disordered, or fails to ‘make sense’, we may experience uneasy emotions. But sensory dis-orders are tied to more than unpleasant urban affects: they can be linked to the experience of urban violence and atmospheres of insecurity.⁶

Sensory regimes and spatial (in)security

Atmospheric understandings of security have served some as fruitful entry points into the embodied politics of safety in the city.⁷ Similarly, scholarly engagements with fear as emotion have pushed forward our understandings of dangerous subjectivities, and the ‘Others’ they enact and relate to.⁸ However, the sensorial and affective realms have been less prominent when it comes to making sense of violence in itself, in relation to urban space. Violence, in our primary understanding of the term, is a corporeal affair. It is a wounding of the flesh, an intense marking of the

1 See e.g. J. Urry (2003), ‘City life and the senses’, in Gary Bridge and Sophie Watson eds, *A Companion to the City*, pp. 388-397. (Malden, MA: Blackwell).

2 E.g. R. Atkinson (2007), ‘Ecology of sound: the sonic order of urban space’, *Urban Studies* Vol.44 No.10 pp.1905-1917; N. Bieleto-Bueno (2017), ‘Noise, soundscape and heritage: Sound cartographies and urban segregation in twenty-first-century Mexico City’, *Journal of Urban Cultural Studies* Vol.4 No.2 pp.107-126.

3 E.g. M. Manalansan (2006), ‘Immigrant lives and the politics of olfaction in the global city’, in J. Drobnick ed., *The Smell Culture Reader*, pp. 41-52. (Oxford and New York: Berg).

4 E.g. A. Rhys-Taylor (2013), ‘Disgust and distinction: the case of the jellied eel’, *The Sociological Review* Vol.61 No.2 pp. 227-246.

5 M. Bull, P. Gilroy, D. Howes and D. Kahn (2006) ‘Introducing Sensory Studies’, *The Senses and Society* Vol.1 No.1 pp. 5-7, p.5.

6 For more about the urban politics of sensory disruption see Jaffe et al. on poverty tourism: Jaffe, Rivke, Eveline Dürr, Gareth A Jones, Alessandro Angelini, Alana Osbourne, and Barbara Vodopivec (2019). ‘What Does Poverty Feel like? Urban Inequality and the Politics of Sensation.’ *Urban Studies*, pp.1-17.

7 The notion of ‘security atmosphere’ as proposed by Adey has been mobilized to capture how bodies are attuned to safety as affect through the material and sensorial properties of the spaces they inhabit and move through. See P. Adey (2014), ‘Security atmospheres or the crystallisation of worlds’, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, Vol. 32, No. 5, pp.834-851.

8 The affective dimensions of fear have been evoked as a key element in the emergence of defensive architecture and urban design aimed at constructing and excluding dangerous ‘Others’ in the works of scholars such as Ahmed. See S. Ahmed (2014), *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press).

body and the psyche. When coupled with ‘urban’, though, the embodied aspect of ‘violence’ recedes into the background and is used across scholarly disciplines to refer to a range of events, policies, and behaviours, whether framed through a focus on social actors and relations, or by concentrating on its cultural iterations.

Yet violence in, of, and through the city is a question of the intimate spheres of embodied experience, as much as it is a culturally framed understanding of socio-structural (and economic) forces. For even when it does not involve physical injury, violence remains a sensory and affective affair – it is recognized through feelings of injustice, isolation or unease, affects which are mediated by combinations of smells, sights, sounds etc. Just as the senses form our experiences of urban space, when organised in familiar configurations, they shape our knowledge of violence, insecurity, and their spatiality.

For example, my experience of the Brussels bombings was intimately tied to my living in the (since infamous) inner-city area of Molenbeek, a large borough known for its diverse population and wide socio-economic variations, yet oversimply depicted in national media and popular discourse as a working-class area predominantly inhabited by a first and second-generation population of Muslim Belgians of Moroccan descent. This representation of the neighbourhood (which omits the complex and layered migratory history of the community) has long served as a racist shorthand for expressing a sense of danger connected to the area. That the perpetrators of the Paris bombings of late 2015 hailed from the vicinity didn’t help: it further fuelled narratives of Molenbeek as a dangerous place – a fact I was repeatedly reminded of when residents in other parts of the city would ask whether I felt safe returning to my neighbourhood after a day’s work in the whiter, wealthier areas of the city. The elements that indexed danger to outsiders, mostly White middle-class city dwellers, were aesthetic and sensory markers of socio-economic inequality and cultural difference, such as social housing blocks, mosques, or the greater presence of Black and Brown bodies. These aesthetic markers carried with them specific sounds, like the mingling of accents and languages, and smells, such as those offered by imported food items on display in the busy commercial artery which leads to the crowded metro station, itself imposing the physical pressing up of bodies (other wealthier city boroughs have refused to have underground trains traverse their neighbourhoods). Eavesdropping on two White male teenagers looking ill at ease in a congested tram carriage passing through Molenbeek a few months after the 2016 attacks, confirmed this: ‘Ça sent une épice, non? Tu vois?’ (‘It smells of a spice, no? You see?’). A brief pause, then the same young man resumes, earnestly surprised: ‘J’étais jamais venu, mais c’est clair que c’est tendu par ici!’ (‘I’d never been here, but it’s clearly tense!’). Here, the violence of urbanization, or the ways in which Brussels is organized and perpetuates racialised and economic segregation, influenced the sensory regimes of the city, linking markers of difference to perceptions of (in)security. In turn, the growing sense of discomfort experienced by the young men was expressed through the synaesthesia – or sensory union – of smell and sound.

What this example exposes in the wake of the bombings is the way individuals are culturally trained to interpret their senses, or the social lives of bodily sensations. Howes,⁹ drawing from multiple examples, has underlined how the sensorium is a social construct, contingent on the ways people interpret their senses. Likewise, sensing violence is intimately related to cultural elaborations of – and habituation to – specific sensory regimes. For example, while a particular sound or smell may trigger an impending sense of danger and violence for some, others will contextualise it as

9 D. Howes (2015), ‘Senses, Anthropology of The’, in N.J. Smelser and P.B. Baltes eds, *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, pp. 615–620. Second Edition.

signifying a pleasant or festive event.¹⁰ In the case of the tram ride, the correlation of certain smells and sights were synonyms of insecurity and unease for young White middle-class men (albeit in a tired cliché). As a brown-skinned person acutely aware of standing out in the predominantly White spheres I occupy for work, I read the same olfactory and visual stimuli as familiar and reassuring.

Sensory disorders

That we make sense of sensory regimes in particular ways points to the idea that cognitive interpretations of the senses, and their resulting affective patterns, are learned. Grasseni refers to this as a 'sensory enskilment'. Looking at cattle breeding in Italy, and learning to develop an 'eye' for the best cows, she explains that 'one learns how to look, how to move and how to exercise one's senses in specific contexts characterised by localised practice'.¹¹ While deployed to the taught subtleties of cattle breeding, this notion of enskilment can also be applied to our ability to detect, recognise and work through urban danger. Our awareness of security, or of danger, is tied to an attunement and acquired interpretation of sensory input. A sudden change in learned sensory patterns, and an exposure to unfamiliar triggers, can indicate that the boundaries between safe and unsafe landscapes have been breached. When a sensory regime shifts, we are attuned to the change, from non-violence to violence (or vice-versa).

While an emplaced experience results from a layering of the sensory, a break in the patterns and orders in which we feel our surroundings, and subsequently interpret them, can make violence more apparent. In Brussels, the day of the attack, moments during which, in another part of the city, first response teams were rushing towards the Maalbeek metro station where the second bomb had detonated, I left my house and headed to a doctor's appointment on foot, unaware of what was unfolding. I noticed how unusually quiet traffic was for a Tuesday morning. The typically busy streets were empty, no cars and few pedestrians, which created a resoundingly deaf audio-scape and indexed a perceptible change in the routine. For me, this engendered feelings of unease and heightened insecurity. Such sensory dis-junctures, or sudden changes in learned patterns, are key to noticing shifts in urban landscapes of danger. These disorders can point to the threshold at which urban violence is identifiable, the moments and places in which violence exceeds the subjective and connects with wider socio-spatial forces.

Here, I have argued for the value of researching urban violence through its sensory regimes, which means teasing out the embodied and affective dimensions of (in)security in the city. I suggest that placing the body at the heart of how we understand the politics at play in and through the city may shed light on the tipping-points of urban violence: the instances in which sensory manifestations of violence connect to the socio-spatial fabric of the urban. As the brief examples provided here show, engaging urban violence through its embodied dimensions serves as an entry point into relations that take place at multiple levels. In Brussels, it helps me tease out the racist and classist organisation of the cityscape and its ties to perceptions of (in)security, as well as allowing me to identify the sensory ripples and shifts that mark spectacular moments of violence such as the 2016 bombings.

10 Sounds for example are experienced as violent or not depending on how individuals *make sense* of them. For further work on soundscapes see S. Feld (2015), 'Acoustemology', in D. Novak and M. Sakakeeny eds, *Keywords in Sound* (Duke University Press).

11 C. Grasseni (2004), 'Skilled Vision. An Apprenticeship in Breeding Aesthetics.' *Social Anthropology* Vol.12 No.1 pp.41-55, p.53.

Building urban violence: the qualities of infrastructure

Wendy Pullan

The Baghdad barrier is just the latest of... engineering solutions to the quest to keep people apart, for their own protection or for the benefit of rulers.... The conflict resolution business is in decline and the concrete industry is taking its place.¹

The triangle of cities, violence and infrastructure is relatively well-researched in social science.² As a product of post-Enlightenment thought, the ‘modernist infrastructural ideal’³ is often regarded as the root of current grievances and violence and it is regularly cited as a central feature of where Western and Western-oriented culture – particularly in the hands of the state or large corporations – has gone wrong.⁴ Infrastructure can exist in both material and organisational ways, and it may also be understood through its metaphorical nature. Indeed, infrastructure in some form may exist in many situations and figures throughout human relations. With such pervasiveness and diversity, infrastructure can mean almost anything where elements are linked systematically.⁵

Infrastructures exist everywhere, but they are particularly in evidence in cities. It could be argued that infrastructures, in their massive operative forms are not only key drivers of cities but are also dependent upon urban density and connectivity to form a conducive setting for their own systems. Some modern urban ideals are posited so completely upon infrastructural technology that whole cities are designed as infrastructural and then said to be ‘smart’. Such an enterprise reduces the richness and contrariness of a city to a unidimensional problem to be solved. For many city dwellers infrastructures remain a practical issue: necessary, but central to inequalities, either too extensive, misplaced or controlling, or, perhaps more obviously, not existing at all.⁶ Violence can exist in many areas of physical manifestation and in long term systematic effect. Such problems regularly figure in social, political and economic research that links exclusion to violence in urban populations. The physical qualities of infrastructures tend to be less considered. Nonetheless, I would argue that certain tangible features of infrastructures play a key role in generating urban violence and conflict. My reflections on infrastructures place them directly in the urban physical fabric as they affect the city’s capacity to be a setting for urban life.

While I acknowledge the relevance of Isin’s claim that of all the body politic only the city exists as both actual and virtual space, and that the relationship between the two is critical,⁷ here I privilege the actual as an embodied reality that underlies significant

1 J. Borger (2007) ‘Security fences or barriers to peace?’ *Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2007/apr/24/iraq.julianborger>
2 Examples include: S. Graham and S. Marvin (2001), *Splintering Urbanism. Networked infrastructures, technological mobilities and the urban condition* (London: Routledge); M. Coward (2009), ‘Infrastructure and the Urbanisation of Security’, *Security Dialogue*, Vol.40 No.4-5 pp.399-418; R. Brand ed. (2009), Special issue on ‘The Architecture of War and Peace’, *Journal of Urban Technology*, Vol.16 No.2-3; Y. Elsheshtawy ed. (2014), Special issue on ‘Urban Violence’, *Built Environment*, Vol.40 No.3; D. Rodgers and B. O’Neill eds (2012), Special issue on ‘Infrastructural Violence’, *Ethnography* Vol.13 No.4.
3 Explored at length in Graham and Marvin (2001).
4 Building on the seminal ideas explored in: J.C. Scott (1998), *Seeing Like a State. How certain schemes to improve the human condition have failed* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press).
5 B. Larkin (2013), ‘The politics and poetics of infrastructure’, *Annual Review of Anthropology* Vol.42 pp.327-43.
6 O’Neill and Rodger’s special issue on urban infrastructural violence emerged from a conference panel on urban misery.
7 E. Isin (2007), ‘City,State: Critique of Scalar Thought’, *Citizenship Studies*, Vol.11 No.2 pp.211-28, p.212.

urban conditions. I ask a relatively simple ontological question: what is there in the physical qualities of seemingly inert infrastructures that may contribute to violent cities? I consider urban examples, first of all, that are already described by research as violent and, secondly, where much of the violence occurs around particular infrastructures.⁸ In this brief essay I have chosen three areas to investigate: scale, division and differentiation.

Scale

Large barrier infrastructures such as walls, roads, viaducts, and buffer zones are regularly found in cities, yet when inserted into the context of existing urban fabric they may be intrusive. To some extent this is due to their scale. The introduction of a six-lane inner city motorway into a well-established urban landscape almost always requires extensive demolition and clashes not only in scale but also in tempo, where speeding vehicles race past pedestrians. Infrastructures are systematic and repetitive, often making them appear larger than they are. In some cases the infrastructure may be ad hoc, reduced to its key characteristics: during the Iraq insurgency the US army used rolls of razor wire to enclose Abu Hishma, a town of about 7000 inhabitants. This instrument of collective punishment for killing an American soldier, although limited in scope and complexity, seemed astonishingly large in that it imprisoned a whole town. Perception is critical as scale is not absolute but relative.

Modern physical infrastructures may also be tiny; in recent decades they have become reliant upon miniscule technologies, especially microchips and fibre-optics, nano-solutions for speedy mass communication and human comfort but also surveillance. Powerful apparatus is often barely visible and seemingly innocuous in urban settings, to convey a sense of hardly being there at all. The infrastructures of modern cities constitute a Gulliverian situation of two extremes, the very large and the very small, with little in the middle scale.

The problem with the infrastructural conception of scale, either large or small, is that human beings usually experience cities in the middle ground. Most of the perception and experience of urban life takes place in the parts that we can see in detail and touch, spaces where we recognise ourselves through relationships between our bodies and space. Merleau-Ponty explains that space is oriented by the body to create a 'spatiality of situation';⁹ this involves a strong and direct reciprocity where space is not only structured through the human body and but by the human sense of self within a particular space. It is the spatial middle ground that is most intimately related to the body and the human awareness of it; thus we can talk about the everyday of cities happening in spaces that form this middle ground, such as the street, square, neighbourhood, home, shop, office. Research in architecture and the human sciences has often focused on the problems that humans experience in spaces that are overly large and intimidating or too small and crowded. There is evidence to show that a coherent sense of space emerges in various interpretations of the 'room'¹⁰ and that even in outdoor environments the room is the common denominator for public space. Urban dwellers in large cities adapt at least to some extent to large infrastructures to use them effectively; nonetheless in many cases the relationship is limited to no more than specific function and expediency, creating what Marc Augé refers to as the non-places of supermodernity.¹¹

8 W. Pullan (2013), 'Spatial Discontinuities: Conflict Infrastructures in Contested Cities', in W. Pullan and B. Baillie eds, *Locating Urban Conflicts: Ethnicity, Nationalism, Everyday Life* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan) pp.17-36.

9 M. Merleau-Ponty (1962), *Phenomenology of Perception*, C. Smith (tr.) (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul) pp.100-101 and developed through ch 3.

10 D. Vesley (2004), *Architecture in the Age of Divided Representation. The Question of Creativity in the Shadow of Production* (Cambridge MA and London: MIT Press) p.140.

11 M. Augé (1995), *Non-places. Introduction to an anthropology of supermodernity*, J. Howe (tr.) (London and New York: Verso).

Division

Out of scale infrastructures may alienate and, especially in conjunction with certain other factors, aggravate existing divisions inside cities, making demographic fissures visible, concrete and seemingly irreversible. Walls, fences, buffer zones, surveillance towers and checkpoint systems may be imposed on existing urban fabric, often as a result of war or sustained conflict, but also underlining ethnic prejudices or as a perpetuation of colonial practices. What are initially regarded as temporary solutions to separate warring factions regularly become permanent fixtures. Hard division cemented into the urban topography due to racial prejudice is evident in the wall along Detroit's Eight Mile Road, built in 1941 to separate black and white populations, and still standing today. The wall still remains, marking the major demographic fissure in the city now considered to be the most divided in the USA.

Everyday urban life is largely generated by diverse forms of movement within a variety of spatial settings; imposed barriers arrest it and tend to breed no-man's lands, no-go zones, areas of extreme control or swaths of urban blight. When such divisions appear in the centre of cities, they can cause serious long-term damage as with the buffer zone that divides Nicosia between the Turkish north and Greek south, an international border embedded in a system of blocked streets, derelict buildings, armed UN observation posts, floodlights and checkpoints (Figure 1). The buffer zone divided hostile factions in 1974, replacing what had been the high street where Turkish and Greek Cypriots traded and mixed in bilingual conversation.¹² Known locally as the Dead Zone, it has killed all life in what was the centre of Nicosia.



Buffer zone dividing Nicosia. Photo: Wendy Pullan.

More insidious are infrastructures with urban functions not obviously intended to result in division, conflict or control. Inner city motorways and rail lines and other forms of high speed transport systems may fracture a city more devastatingly than any dedicated piece of dividing infrastructure. We know from the legacy of Roman roads that transport alignments structure cities in the very long term. In Beirut motorways make high-speed cuts in the city which segregate neighbourhoods of different confessional groups. In Jerusalem the separation wall has galvanised world attention, but it is the segregated road system that has restructured the landscape to lock in separate Palestinian and Israeli neighbourhoods (Figure 2).¹³ In all of these cities – Nicosia, Beirut, Jerusalem – large dividing structures are so entrenched that planning a more integrated urban fabric remains elusive. The infrastructures have ensured long term segregation.



Jerusalem: Segregated road systems for Palestinians and Israelis. Photo: Ahmad Gharabli/AFP via Getty Images.

It would be wrong to underestimate the daily limitations, harsh controls and misery faced by urban populations when their lives and livelihoods are divided. At the same time there is a deeper structural problem for the cities themselves. Borders and the infrastructural systems associated with them are normally found at the edges of a physical entity. Political borders, that developed historically with the nation state, normally cut through minimally inhabited territory. Urban frontiers may have a role at the periphery of cities, although urban sprawl has become more common than a defined edge. But borders imposed in the centre of cities are another matter completely: they inflict major dividing infrastructures to subvert urban practices. Frontier infrastructures do not belong in city centres. Moreover, even in highly complex city typologies, there is a basic tension between centre(s) and periphery that structures the city to give it visibility and meaning. Such a dynamic is a fundamental part of urban order and renders it possible to make sense of cities, to recognise them as such. A complete inversion of centre and periphery by

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W. Pullan (2013), 'Conflict's Tools. Borders, boundaries and mobility in Jerusalem's spatial structures', *Mobilities* Vol.8 No.1 pp.125-47.

putting a dividing infrastructure into the middle of the city is a subversive transposal of urban order.¹⁴

Differentiation

Infrastructural walls, barriers, motorways, bridges, viaducts, checkpoints, surveillance towers, public transport routes, etc are usually designed for one clear purpose. Other functions may be appended, like a railway station with cafes and shops, but the essentialist nature of infrastructures remains in their dedicated functionality. Infrastructures that are combinations of barriers and surveillance lend themselves well to separating or controlling different groups of people. On the other hand, everyday city spaces that have developed with less formal intervention over time tend to be more receptive to diversity and spontaneity. The latter have the capacity for differentiation, expressed in, for example, humanly-scaled streets, shop front facades, varied architecture, mixed pedestrian activities, cyclists and slow moving traffic. Interaction, transition and mediation are possible in these more granular city spaces and the unexpected or extemporaneous is common. With differentiation a potentially infinite number of nuanced aspects of urban encounter – positive and negative, peaceful and conflictual – are present and fluid; it is one of the key conditions of being urban. Infrastructures, on the other hand, tend to function best as dedicated and efficient systems with minimal differentiation, making them isolated, closed, univalent and, with respect to the wider city, obtuse. They are part of more extensive contexts only in the most limited of ways, so that integration between differentiated and undifferentiated structures in cities is largely absent. This incompatibility may be the most potent identifier of an infrastructural ontology that fractures cities and contributes to urban violence.¹⁵

The separation barrier in Palestine is made up of pre-fabricated concrete segments up to eight metres high, dropped into place with a crane and interspersed with concrete watchtower units. This basic technology is now used globally when fast division is required; so, for example, the American army constructed a wall through a portion of Sadr City in Baghdad using the same concrete modules whilst implementing a siege.¹⁶ Attempts to deflect the relentlessness of such wall construction are common; in Palestine large portions of concrete have been covered with graffiti conveying political and activist sentiments, cartoons, memorialisation of martyrs and even advertising. Otherwise explained, the graffiti can be seen as an effort (whether conscious or not) to combat the singularity of the wall and introduce differentiation to engage it in some way with the urban milieu in which it finds itself.

Whether intended or not, conflict infrastructures play key parts in large planning strategies. In Latin American cities the divide between the planned city and the favela is created less by freestanding dividing barriers than by walls of dense concrete and steel architecture of the former that becomes an impenetrable barrier against the latter (Figure 3). In other words, the tower blocks of the city become reduced to a single value, that of demarcation and defence, to take on a one-dimensional infrastructural capacity. This is illustrated clearly in the terminology of the favela where the ‘proper’ city is referred to as the *asfalto*, the ‘tarmac’, or simply, the ‘concrete’.¹⁷ The architecture is severely limited in its differential capacity.

14 Discussed at length in W Pullan (2011), ‘Frontier urbanism: The periphery at the centre of contested cities’, *Journal of Architecture*, Vol.16 No.1 pp.15-35.

15 W. Pullan (2018), ‘Violent infrastructures, places of conflict: Urban order in divided cities’, in R. Burdett and S. Hall eds, *The Sage Handbook of Urban Sociology: New approaches to the twenty-first century city* (London: Sage): 376-96.

16 J. Spencer (2019), ‘Stealing the Enemy’s Urban Advantage: The Battle of Sadr City’, Modern War Institute, <https://mwi.usma.edu/stealing-enemy-urban-advantage-battle-sadr-city/>

17 The encounter with the *asfalto* by a resident of the favela is narrated in D. Saunders (2011), *Arrival City* (London: William Heinemann), pp.69-70.

The favela on the hillside, or *morro*, is certainly large and extensive, but the individual houses tend to be more articulated in form with greater openness, and ultimately more differentiated. In Jerusalem, the ring of Israeli residential settlements, built to enclose and prevent expansion of the Palestinian part of the city, is regularly likened to a new city wall.¹⁸ In this guise whole settlements, with all of their inherent architectural (if not political) complexity, are reimagined as an undifferentiated barrier infrastructure.



Sao Paulo, favela and asfalto. Photo: Pedro Savério Penna. Licensed under CC BY-ND 2.0.

Infrastructures command an exceedingly strong physical presence in cities. An infrastructure may be designed to exhibit a single-minded function, as in a dividing wall or motorway. In some cases these may be breath-taking in their clarity of purpose, so much so that there is a high level of reification: the infrastructure is instrumentalised, detaching it from urban life and human-oriented value. Obviously not all infrastructures are harmful and many provide much needed services. But as already noted, they do not function contextually and so remain difficult to absorb into most urban circumstances; this is often exacerbated in cities that suffer high levels of conflict and violence. Whether infrastructures could be reformulated to be better assimilated into cities and become more resilient in keeping with the requirements of urban citizens and civil society is a significant question but beyond the scope of this discussion. The ontological characteristics of infrastructures discussed here, including lack of human scale, propensity to cause division, and absence of differentiation, are all contrary to open and diverse urban space and fabric and offer only minimal and limited engagement with cities and their inhabitants. In these ways infrastructures act as a void in the city, one that can be filled with latent violence and the possibility of its eruption at any time.

¹⁸ Since the occupation of Palestinian Jerusalem in 1967, Israeli policy has been largely developed by its planning; see: D. Kroyanker (1985), *Jerusalem. Planning and Development 1982-85* (Jerusalem: Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies); ch 6.

When surveillance becomes violent: a general approach

Alcides Eduardo dos Reis Peron

Introduction

For the last thirty years, public and private authorities from major global cities have been deploying sophisticated surveillance systems, performing an environmental management of security. In theory, these systems would deter criminals, reducing confrontations and violence, also directing police efforts more towards crime prevention and risk management.¹ These arguments chime with Foucault's² description of the emergence of a scopic-disciplinary model which entails the modulation of surveillance mechanisms to produce docile bodies, eliminating the need for physical violence.

Generally unnoticed and hierarchical, surveillance enables an asymmetric relationship of power, which is manifested through the production of knowledge and the ruling of the rhythm and functioning of bodies. Lyon³ understands that there is a form of violence in the combination of biased gaze and surveillance devices but is still convinced that contemporary data surveillance (dataveillance) performs rationalised and mild forms of power, erasing violent practices. Zuboff, for example, presents the idea of an 'instrumentarian power',⁴ which evolves within this new dynamic of massive data collection and algorithmic governance, and eliminates violence from social control practices.

In contrast, recent events, such as the deployment of biometric systems for tracking individuals, racist surveillance practices and over-policing of certain groups in the US and UK, and social segregation in Brazil, reveal harmful and structurally violent uses of surveillance. Thus, the emerging instrumental power does not seem to completely erase violence. Actually, it reinforces discriminating, segregating practices.

Against the rationalism supposedly embedded in Zuboff's 'instrumentarian power', I will briefly explore how surveillance becomes the means through which structural violence is reproduced, and how it mediates direct violent practices. In this sense, I will look into the concept of 'instrumentarian power', unpacking its practices and characteristics. In contrast to Zuboff's description, I lean on Galtung's⁵ approach to structural violence, to support my argument on the pervasive and ubiquitous violence derived from new surveillance systems.

Dataveillance and instrumentarian power

Recent technological advances in the field of information and communication technologies popularised 'Big Data' techniques among private companies and public services by offering data as a new 'raw material' for accumulation. These innovations were taken up by the market, becoming a central activity in contemporary capitalism

1 D. Garland (2008), *A cultura do Controle: Crime e Ordem Social na Sociedade Contemporânea* (Rio de Janeiro, Brazil: Revan).

2 M. Foucault (1995 [1975]) *Discipline and Punish: The birth of the prison* (New York: Vintage Books).

3 D. Lyon (1994), *The Electronic Eye: The Rise of Surveillance Society* (London: Polity Press). p.207.

4 S. Zuboff (2019) *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power* (London, UK: Profile Books).

5 J. Galtung (1969) 'Violence, Peace, and Peace Research'. *Peace Research* Vol.6 No.3 pp.167-191. p.10.

and public security management. In this context, monitoring practices become mediated by algorithms that sort information of interest, produce alerts or list content among a huge amount of data. They produce sets of suggestions to users, ranging from an online purchase based on their emotional state, to strategies for police searches in areas where crimes may occur.

Zuboff understands that monitoring and data collection are determinant for current processes of capital accumulation, hence the concept of ‘surveillance capitalism’. In her perspective, users inadvertently give up their data, which become the basis for tech companies’ profits. Thus, ‘instrumentarian power’ is built upon statistical and predictive knowledge about the population. Most importantly, it is exercised over individuals mildly, modulating rationalities, decision-making structures and behaviours. It operates remotely, in the shadows, without manifesting itself through terror, murder or exclusion. The instrumentarian power grows based on the users’ (self) authorisation, reducing individual freedom in the name of predictability and risk management.⁶ As Zuboff portrays, in contrast with authoritarian (totalitarian) regimes from other periods, this modality of power produces control and subjection without any type of violent mediation.

Based on the extraction of behavioural surplus value through computing and prediction, this instrumentarian power is ultimately manifested in the possession of the means to change behaviour.⁷ It rests on the capacity to influence or direct people’s behaviour through the knowledge gathered and produced from data. However, when Zuboff affirms that this knowledge production does not encompass violence, she seems to be clearly referring to the notion of direct physical violence, paying less attention to the way in which such power intensifies forms of social violence and segregation in the urban environment.

It is precisely at this point that several researchers affirm that big data and surveillance systems, especially when oriented as predictive inferences (on future trends and risks), can intensify the reproduction of biases as well as processes of discrimination and segregation.⁸ Algorithms and surveillance systems, like any other technology, are inscriptions of interests and values consistent with the social and political arrangements of their time.⁹ Many of these systems use past statistics to indicate future trends – e.g. predictive policing systems, analytical camera image reading systems, social risk analysis databases – potentially causing discrimination and segregation in urban security.¹⁰ In other cases, public-private surveillance camera systems, mobile applications, and biometric facial recognition systems not only reproduce forms of discrimination,¹¹ but may end up giving rise to harmful security practices. These forms of monitoring and control, thus, produce complex effects on the social body, which I believe can be debated in terms of indirect or structural violence.

6 Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*, p.381.

7 Ibid., pp. 396-397.

8 A. Ferguson (2017), *The Rise of Big Data Policing: Surveillance, Race, and The Future of Law Enforcement* (New York: New York University Press).

9 C. O’Neil (2017), *Weapons of Math destruction: How Big Data Increases Inequality* (New York: Broadway Books).

10 N. Byfield (2019). ‘Race Science and Surveillance: Police as the New Race Scientists’, *Social Identities: Journal for the Study of Race, Nation and Culture*, Vol. 25, pp.76-90.

11 C. Garvie, A. Bedoya and J. Frankle (2016) ‘The perpetual line-up: unregulated police face recognition in America’ (Georgetown Law, Center on Privacy & Technology) <https://www.perpetuallineup.org/> [Accessed 18 September 2020].

Violence and structural violence

Debating violence requires working in the intersection of sociology, anthropology, and psychology. Violence may be perceived not only as the imposition of physical pain, but also as a structure of conditions that weaken and marginalise groups of people. Furthermore, violence is extremely subjective; it is differently described among distinct social groups, also manifesting as the rational and legitimate exercise of State power.

In the 1960s, Johan Galtung was concerned with the continuing effects of imperialist exploitation and social predation, and with the state of permanent tension established by the Cold War, where peace and war were indistinguishable. Galtung approaches violence in its multiple manifestations, while also bringing to the fore the nuances of building consistent states of peace. Thus, violence gets manifested directly and indirectly, and both must be equally accounted for.

While direct violence is an act of coercion painfully experienced by individuals, Galtung describes structural (or indirect) violence as a state in which the full realisation of human potential is hampered. Thus, the absence of conflict is not enough to define peace. It is also necessary that individual freedom and human desires are not suppressed by economic, political, and cultural processes. In his perspective, violence may also result from a structure of relationships and institutions apparently distinct from the violent effects they cause, such as social inequality, lack of sanitation, identity depreciation, destabilisation of cultural references or belief systems. Since they prevent personal fulfilment, impede the development of one's capacities, and block social cohesion, these processes should be recognised as violent. Moreover, structural violence may be the result of imperialist and colonial processes,¹² leading to a situation of permanent instability, as they may end up stimulating forms of direct violence.¹³

The violence we see being exercised through discretionary data collection and surveillance applications in urban security devices does not, in fact, seem to be linked to an aggressive mediation of relations. However, these systems do enable forms of constraint, exclusion, and segregation, configuring a structural violence that reinforces misery and inequality.

Surveillance and structural violence in urban space

The instrumentarian power may end up reinforcing structural violence in several contexts, making discriminatory processes more recurrent. Foucault classified forms of control, such as biopower and discipline (intensive in surveillance), as 'productive' – capable of reinforcing life and programming the body for work – in which violence is not in the foreground. However, even in the most ethereal form of control, the management of fear and structural violence is always immanent, as a way of expanding government mechanisms.¹⁴ For instance, Bigo and Tsoukala¹⁵ explore the characteristics of disciplinary and governmental powers in European immigration policies, depicting how surveillance practices enact (in)security. Through the constitution of a 'ban-optic' device (in analogy with the panopticon), exclusion, over-policing and restrictive practices make up the arsenal of urban and border security policies.

12 J. Galtung (1971) 'A Structural Theory of Imperialism', *Peace Research* Vol. 8 No.2 pp. 81-117. p.81.

13 J.M. Pureza (2011), 'O Desafio Crítico dos Estudos da paz', *Relações Internacionais*, Vol. 32, pp.5-22, p.13.

14 T. Lemke (2017), *Foucault, Governamentalidade e Crítica*. (São Paulo, Brazil: Politéia).

15 D. Bigo and A. Tsoukala (2008) 'Understanding (in)security', in D. Bigo and A. Tsoukala eds, *Terror, Insecurity and Liberty: Illiberal Practices of Liberal Regimes after 9/11* (London/New York: Routledge) pp.10-48.

Several cases reinforce this perspective. In the US, systems that use criminal statistics to identify regions with a high probability of crimes (e.g. PredPol, DAS), are enabling anticipatory police strategies, and justifying the over-policing of certain areas and groups. These systems allegedly actualise ‘future risks’, informing present strategies and decisions, and legitimising anticipatory actions. However, recent studies have shown that such systems tends to reinforce discriminatory processes and weaken the relationship between police and society.¹⁶ Also, when assessing future crime, they may ‘produce’ crimes instead of preventing them.¹⁷

In Brazil, São Paulo’s police forces imported a surveillance system designed by the New York Police and Microsoft called Domain Awareness System (DAS). The system is a public-private surveillance assemblage oriented to expel unwanted people from wealthy neighbourhoods and other private spaces, enhancing segregation processes in the city.¹⁸ For example, the security and monitoring company Aster developed a study¹⁹ called ‘Watching together’ about the neighbourhood ‘Vila Leopoldina’. This study describes the region as a high-risk location due to a strong socioeconomic contrast that would lead to trespassing, homelessness, prostitution, side by side with commercial spaces and middle-class residences. It recommends a partnership between their systems and Detecta, arguing that only by an intensive surveillance programme can urban security be achieved. At the same time, other systems operating under the Detecta umbrella, like City Cameras and SP+Segura (spotting disorders and criminal occurrences in an interactive map) are scattered around areas of social conflict (with drug users, and homeless people) reinforcing a repressive approach against these individuals.²⁰

In London, a system named ‘Gang Matrix’ was developed to deal with the emergence of so-called ‘gangs’. It works through the collection of data from suspects on social networks and other sources, profiling generally young black people on the city outskirts, and classifying their dangerousness.²¹ The Gang Matrix assesses the risk posed by these individuals, including profiles of minors, and provides police with an instrument that authorises stop and search.²² Consequently, the rise in use of stop and search on young black people in the UK seems to be contributing to the development of traumas among those who had their rights violated, and reinforcing prejudices and moral panics about the confusing concept of gangs.²³ For instance, between 2018 and 2020, there was an increase in police approaches to black and Asian groups in London, from 120 per thousand population between 2018 and 2019, to 174 per thousand between 2019 and 2020, compared to much lower figures for groups of white individuals (76/1,000 during the first period, and 114/1,000 during the second one).²⁴

The London police also deployed a real-time facial recognition system, capable of processing sensitive data from several people simultaneously. During its tests, several researchers highlighted how invasive and biased this system appeared to be in how

16 B. Lipton (2019) ‘It’s PredPol, and it’s going to reduce crime’: Agencies take algorithmic effectiveness on faith, with few checks in place.’ (MuckRock) <https://www.muckrock.com/news/archives/2019/nov/05/predictive-policing-lacks-accuracy-tests/> [Accessed 19 June 2020]

17 R. Benjamin (2019), *Race after technology: Abolitionist Tools for the New Jim Code* (Cambridge: Polity Press) p.83.

18 A. Peron and M. Alvarez (2019) ‘Governing the City: The Detecta Surveillance System in São Paulo and the Role of Private Vigilantism in the Public Security’, *Revue de Sciences et Actions Sociales*, Vol.12, pp.1-36.

19 Aster (2017) *Zelando Juntos: Vila Leopoldina* (São Paulo), <http://promo.aster.com.br/zelando-juntos>.

20 Peron and Alvarez, ‘Governing the City’ p.17.

21 Amnesty International (2018), *Trapped in the Matrix: Secrecy, Stigma, and bias in the MET’s Gangs Database*. <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/files/reports/Trapped%20in%20the%20Matrix%20Amnesty%20report.pdf> [Accessed 2 August 2020].

22 J.A. Densley and D.C. Pyrooz (2020) ‘The Matrix in context: Taking stock of police gang databases in London and Beyond’, *Youth Justice*, Vol.20 No.1 pp.11-30.

23 P. Williams (2019), *Being Matrixed: The (over)policing of Gang suspects in London* (London, UK: Stop Watch).

24 Metropolitan Police (2020), *Stop & Account: Self Defined Ethnicity*. <https://www.met.police.uk/sd/stats-and-data/met/stop-and-search-dashboard/> [Accessed 20 September 2020].

it collected individual data.²⁵ The same researchers pointed to several flaws that may induce police errors. This perspective is confirmed by several studies which evidence that facial recognition systems are quite skewed against dark-skinned faces – which would demonstrate their immaturity as a security apparatus.²⁶ Such studies also show that these devices can reinforce prejudice, especially when their databases are built on criminal data and directed at black communities, particularly in the US.²⁷ For instance, a similar technology was applied in two Brazilian cities, Salvador and Rio de Janeiro, resulting in the arrest of 151 people, 90% of whom were black.²⁸

There are just a few records of direct aggression suffered by people under surveillance. In fact, dataveillance seems to reinforce an imaginary of policing without violence, or with limited resort to violence. The deployment of intelligent surveillance and monitoring systems, however, reveals how these devices produce constraints on people's movements, deepen segregation processes, and reinforce discrimination. Often, as Ruha Benjamin reminds us,²⁹ these problems do not show that this form of security government is racist or necessarily elitist, rather that those who develop these systems are separated from their effects by a deep chasm and barely perceive the harms caused. Here lies the danger of structural violence; once these instruments are not perceived as enablers of noxious practices, their contribution to discriminatory practices is effectively effaced.

As security practices become more dependent on surveillance strategies and technologies, the more they are configured as forms of day-to-day control, for ensuring regularities. This idea of security as a way to govern everyday deviances and flows of circulation is an imaginary currently diffused by transnational private companies embedded in the propaganda of programmes for smart cities – in which technology is portrayed as an element capable of erasing violent forms of policing. Although the friction produced by security forces may be reduced in some spaces, further social tensions seem to be gaining ground: disproportionate data collection, over-policing, racism and segregation. The use of these technologies, therefore, seems to hide behind the cloak of 'neutrality' of algorithms and its powerful ability to normalise structural forms of subjection against vulnerable groups. The effects that policing and surveillance seek to prevent, thus become its own outcomes.

25 P. Fussey and D. Murray (2019), *Independent Report on the London Metropolitan Police Service's Trial of Live Facial Recognition Technology*. (Essex, UK: The Human Rights, Big Data and Technology Project).

26 J. Buolamwini and T. Gebru (2018) 'Gender Shades: Intersectional Accuracy Disparities in Commercial Gender Classification', *Proceedings of Machine Learning Research*, Vol.81 pp. 1-15.

27 Garvie et al., 'The perpetual line-up'.

28 J. Barbon (2019) '151 pessoas são presas por reconhecimento facial no país; 90% são negras'. *Folha de São Paulo*. <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/cotidiano/2019/11/151-pessoas-sao-presas-por-reconhecimento-facial-no-pais-90-sao-negras.shtml> [Accessed 13 July 2020].

29 Benjamin, *Race after Technology*.

Access to health services and infrastructures in the context of urban violence: perspective from Karachi

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Introduction

Karachi has witnessed extreme and prolonged episodes of urban violence over the years. The roots of urban violence in Karachi are embedded in sectarian, ethnic and political tensions, exacerbated by the lack of infrastructure and social services, poor socio-economic indicators and weak governance. Ethnic, sectarian and political violence in Karachi has been a recurring phenomenon since the 1980s and continued periodically into the 2010s, often bringing the city to a standstill, and generally condemning the citizens to live in constant fear of violent crimes.¹ Violence emanating from religious extremism and militancy became pronounced from 2006 till early 2010s. The prevailing law and order situation allowed the emergence of loci in the city marked by gang violence. All these factors have a detrimental effect on the citizens' access to infrastructure and basic services, including access to and provision of healthcare services.

Located on the Arabian Sea, Karachi, is a potpourri of ethnicities, linguistic groups and religious sects. This city of over 16 million inhabitants was the first capital of the country until the newly built city of Islamabad assumed that role.² The industrial and financial epicentre of the country, Karachi has the largest seaport and is the highest contributor to Pakistan's GDP.³ Karachi was one of the prominent urban and business centres during the colonial era in united India and still carries vestiges of that period. Race was a determinant then of the uneven development across the city, just as socioeconomic status is today. Karachi remains a mix of upmarket planned urban localities, unplanned settlements and urban slums (*katchi abaadi*).

The demographic mix of the city has been a constantly evolving mosaic with in-migration changing the balance of the city's ethnic, linguistic, political and religious fabric, particularly since Independence in 1947.⁴ Along with a constant trickle of migration, the history of Karachi is marked by easily discernable waves. The first wave of mass migration occurred at the time of Partition of India in 1947 and lasted for almost four years until 1951.⁵ The population of Karachi more than doubled, from 0.45 million in 1947 to 1.13 million in 1951.⁶ After the government embarked on an industrialisation programme in Karachi, the next two decades saw migrants from northern areas of the country arriving, with different customs

1 International Crisis Group (2017), 'Pakistan: Stoking the Fire in Karachi'. Available at <https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-asia/pakistan/284-pakistan-stoking-fire-karachi>.

2 Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, Government of Pakistan Population of Karachi Division (All 6 districts) – Population Census 2017. Available at <http://www.pbs.gov.pk/content/population-census>.

3 Commissioner Karachi Division. Available at <https://commissionerkarachi.gos.pk/karachidivision.html>

4 Ibid.

5 M. Pithawalla (1950), *An Introduction to Karachi: Its Environs and Hinterland* (2nd edn, The Times Press).

6 A. Hasan (2009), *The Unplanned Revolution: Observations on the Process of Socio-economic Change in Pakistan* (Oxford University Press), p.228.

and social institutions.⁷ The 1971 Indo-Pakistani war and the Soviet-Afghan war which continued throughout the 1980s resulted in large numbers of refugees – Bengalis, Burmese and Afghans – settling in Karachi.⁸

This continuous influx has had two important consequences: the city struggled to provide basic services to an ever-growing population; and the ethnic, religious, political and linguistic divides in the city were reinforced in competition for the limited resources. Particularly since the 1980s these divisions have led to recurring episodes of urban violence which in turn has reinforced these divisions.⁹ Sectioned off neighborhoods with restricted access to protect particular groups have arisen.¹⁰

The rapid and continuous expansion in population meant that provision of housing, sanitation, health, education, policing, governance and infrastructure development could never keep pace with the scale of needs. A large proportion (70%) of Karachi's population is poor and almost half the city's population live in *katchi abaadis*.¹¹ The situation is further exacerbated by a lack of inclusive urban planning, and some sectors of infrastructure development and housing being left largely to the extremely profit-driven informal sector.¹²

The effect of violence on access to healthcare

Violence against healthcare is a global concern for humanitarian actors. The death of 24 civilians in an armed attack on a maternity ward in a Kabul hospital and the reported bombings of healthcare facilities in Syria demonstrate the immense human cost of attacks on healthcare in fragile and violent settings.¹³

A study conducted in Egypt found 59.7% of healthcare workers reporting violence at their workplace.¹⁴ The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated strains on healthcare systems and healthcare workers across the globe. Besides the risk of getting infected, healthcare workers responding to COVID-19 have faced verbal abuse, physical assaults, social ostracisation and stigmatisation across several healthcare systems.¹⁵

Access to and provision of healthcare services in Karachi were severely affected during periods of urban violence, as curfews, roadblocks, protests and strikes, and restrictions on movements hampered patients' access to medical services and made it hard to provide emergency medical services. Access to certain areas depended on the healthcare service provider's real or perceived ethnic and political affiliations. Clinics closed in areas of insecurity. Doctors were subjected to extortion, abducted and killed for sectarian, ethnic, political and financial reasons.¹⁶ A significant proportion of healthcare workers were forced to consider relocation or migration to

7 A. Hasan (1993), 'Karachi and the Global Nature of Urban Violence', *The Urban Age*, Vol. 1, No.4.
 8 H. Gazdar (2003), 'A Review of Migration Issues in Pakistan, Collective for Social Science Research', Conference Paper presented at Regional Conference on Migration, Development and Pro-Poor Policy Choices in Asia, 22-24 June, 2003, p.13.
 9 O. Verkaaik (2016), 'Violence and Ethnic Identity Politics in Karachi and Hyderabad', *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, Vol. 39, No.4.
 10 S.A. Kaker (2014), 'Enclaves, Insecurity and Violence in Karachi', *South Asian History and Culture*, Vol. 5 No.1. 93-107, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/19472498.2013.863016>.
 11 International Crisis Group, 'Pakistan: Stoking the Fire in Karachi'.
 12 Hasan, *The Unplanned Revolution*.
 13 BBC News (2020), Afghan attack: maternity ward death toll climbs to 24. BBC News 13 May. Available at <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-52642503#:~:text=The%20number%20of%20people%20who,injured%2C%20the%20health%20ministry%20said>.
 14 R.F. Abdellah and K.M. Salama (2017), 'Prevalence and risk factors of workplace violence against healthcare workers in emergency department in Ismailia, Egypt', *Pan African Medical Journal* Vol.26 No.21. Available at: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/28451000/>
 15 D. McKay, M. Heisler, R. Mishori, H. Catton, O. Kloiber (2020), 'Attacks against healthcare personnel must stop, especially as the world fights COVID-19', *The Lancet*, Vol. 395, No. 10239. Available at [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanct/article/PIIS0140-6736\(20\)31191-0/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanct/article/PIIS0140-6736(20)31191-0/fulltext).
 16 South Asia Terrorism Portal (n.d.), 'Doctors killed in Pakistan 2001-2018'. Available at: http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/pakistan/database/Doctors_killed_Pakistan.htm.

other countries. There was a spill-over of the urban violence into healthcare settings and healthcare facilities were directly targeted, including with bombs.

The Health Care in Danger initiative

It was against this backdrop that the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) commenced working towards protection of healthcare in Karachi in 2014, under the framework of its global Health Care in Danger (HCiD) initiative. This initiative works to improve the protection of patients, healthcare workers, facilities and transport from violence by engaging in humanitarian diplomacy, advocacy, promotion of laws and practical interventions.

To address the phenomenon of violence against healthcare in Pakistan, the ICRC partnered with public health institutions, hospitals, ambulance services, universities, academicians, healthcare authorities and other stakeholders. This initial informal community of concern (CoC) was instrumental in mobilising all the relevant actors for meaningful action. To mount a contextually relevant response, the CoC needed to take an evidence-based approach. To understand the magnitude, kinds and dynamics of violence faced by healthcare and to identify strategies that could prevent and de-escalate violence, a research study was conducted in Karachi. The study involved all categories of healthcare workers. It provided insights into the phenomenon of violence against healthcare and found an intersection between causes driving urban violence and violence against healthcare. It was found that reactive violence occurring in healthcare settings was a major public health issue which rarely found its way into the news headlines, unlike the more widely reported premeditated and proactive violence (bomb blasts, premeditated attacks on hospitals, etc.).

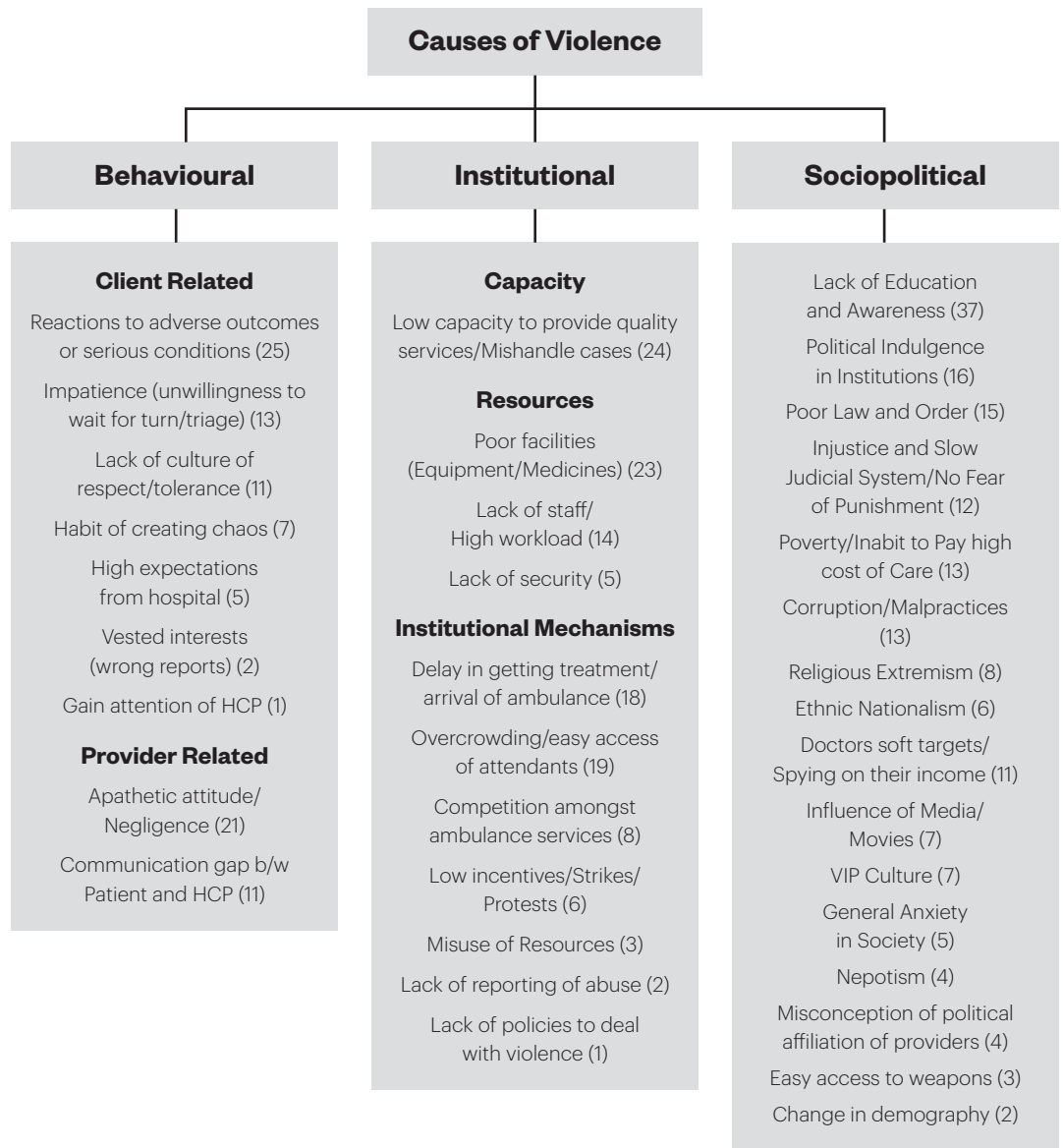
The study found that around one-third of all healthcare providers experienced some form of violence over a period of 12 months.¹⁷ Emergency departments were the commonest sites while ambulance workers were the cadre of healthcare personnel most vulnerable to violence. It was found that patients' attendants, the general public and patients themselves were the perpetrators in the majority of incidents. Besides deaths and physical injuries, violence against healthcare was associated with severe psychological consequences. An alarming finding of the study was the normalisation of the phenomenon within healthcare workers i.e. a level of acceptance for violence. More than half the affected individuals did not report the incidents, while around two thirds thought the incident could have been prevented. It was also found that the healthcare workers were never trained to manage and de-escalate violent behaviour in healthcare settings. The study classified the causes of violence against healthcare as behavioural, institutional and socio-political, identified interventions for protection of healthcare and called for a multi-disciplinary response to address the issue.¹⁸ Similar studies were conducted later in Peshawar and 16 other cities which validated the findings of the study and established the interventions identified in the Karachi study to be applicable on a large scale in all settings.¹⁹

17 L. Baig, S. Shaikh, M. Polkowski (2018), 'Violence Against Health Care Providers: A Mixed-Methods Study from Karachi, Pakistan', *Journal of Emergency Medicine*, Vol. 54, No. 4.

18 L. Baig, S. Kauser, S. Shaikh, M. Polkowski (2018), 'Multiple dimensions of violence against healthcare providers in Karachi: Results from a multicentre study from Karachi', *Journal of Pakistan Medical Association* Vol. 68, No. 8.

19 S. Shaikh, L.A. Baig, I. Hashmi et al. (2020), 'The magnitude and determinants of violence against healthcare workers in Pakistan', *BMJ Global Health*, Vol. 5, No. 4.

Causes of violence²⁰



The baseline study provided the guiding light for developing the necessary interventions. In 2016, while further exploration of the issue in other parts of the country continued, the findings from Karachi were used to develop training for healthcare workers on how to manage and de-escalate violence in healthcare settings. The training was developed by the research team, a psychologist and an expert medical educator, and comprised sections on understanding violence, de-escalation techniques, communication skills, rights and responsibilities of healthcare workers and psychosocial self-care. It was piloted in different hospitals

20 ICRC (2015), *Violence against healthcare: Results from a multi-centre study in Karachi*, Available at https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&ved=2ahUKEwip3InWrNzqAhXZ1wKH7dA6sQFjACegQIARAB&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.icrc.org%2Fen%2Fdownload%2Ffile%2F18403%2F2015_violence_against_health_care-results_from_a_multi-centre_study_in_karachi.pdf&usq=AOvVawO2mt1o3PoUttiXOLIL9qs.

in Karachi and later rolled out in other cities including Peshawar, Lahore and Islamabad. The effectiveness of the training was assessed by comparing two hospitals: one where the staff had had the training and another where they had not. Although the incidents of violence showed only a marginal reduction, the self-perceived score of confidence in coping with patient aggression was significantly higher in healthcare workers who were trained.²¹ This also reflects the importance of working with a multidisciplinary approach to address the issue.

The interventions identified in the Karachi baseline study and similar HCiD research in other parts of the country called for strengthening the institutional measures and enhancing physical security of healthcare facilities. A security assessment was conducted in two Karachi hospitals using a tool adopted from Ingersoll Rand Security Technologies, Occupational Safety and Health Association and findings of baseline research carried out by the HCiD initiative in 2017.²² The assessment recommended a four-pronged framework comprising restricting access of attendants/visitors/vendors, improving interaction between patients/healthcare workers/guards, mechanisms of reporting and responding to violent events, and maintaining sufficient resources for enhancing and improving security in hospitals. A similar tool developed as part of the global HCiD efforts was piloted in a major tertiary care hospital. The tool assesses the preparedness of a healthcare facility to deal with the risks that it faces and to ensure continuity of provision of services in the case of a violent event.

Influencing behaviour is a cornerstone of the ICRC's work towards preserving the lives and dignity of victims of conflict and violence. The Karachi baseline study had identified ambulance workers as the group of healthcare workers most vulnerable to violence, usually ensuing when they arrived late at emergencies due to people not giving way to ambulances in heavy urban traffic or, in some cases, obstructing them. A mass media campaign to influence behaviour and promote the right of way for ambulances was conducted in Karachi in 2016. The effectiveness of the campaign was assessed and a 16.2 % immediate term improvement in motorists giving way to ambulances was recorded.²³ Encouraged by this outcome, a similar campaign was conducted nationwide in 2017, effecting an 8.7% increase in the short term in the number of motorists giving way to ambulances.²⁴ In 2019, the message of the campaign was broadened towards a wider appeal for respect of all cadres of healthcare. The ICRC's partners for the HCiD initiative acted as force multipliers amplifying the impact of the media campaigns.

Besides the awareness campaigns undertaken to influence behaviour, the ICRC and its partners are working on a project in Karachi and Peshawar to employ insights from behavioural sciences to influence the behaviour of patients and their attendants in emergency departments. It is expected that the use of these novel approaches will lead to a reduction in violence in emergency settings without recourse to resource intensive interventions.

21 S. Tanzil, L. Baig, S. Shaikh, I. Hashmi, A. Khan, M. Polkowski (2018), 'Effectiveness of training on de-escalation of violence and management of aggressive behavior faced by healthcare providers in public sector hospitals of Karachi', *Journal of Pakistan Medical Sciences*, Vol. 34, No. 2.

22 S. Shaikh, L. Baig, M. Polkowski, I. Hashmi (2018), 'Findings from Healthcare in Danger Project: Security assessment of a public and private tertiary care hospital in Karachi: Gaps and way forward', *Journal of the Pakistan Medical Association*, Vol. 68, No. 11.

23 S. Shaikh, L. A. Baig, M. Polkowski (2017), 'Effectiveness of media awareness campaigns on the proportion of vehicles that give space to ambulances on roads: An observational study', *Pakistan Journal of Medical Sciences*, Vol. 33, No. 1.

24 S. Shaikh, I. Hashmi, L.A. Baig et al. (2020), 'Assessment of a mass media campaign on giving way to ambulances in five cities of Pakistan', *Journal of the Pakistan Medical Association*, Vol. 70, No. 9. Available at <https://www.jpma.org.pk/PdfDownload/9794>.

The ICRC and its partners in the HClD initiative have persistently lobbied for legislative and policy changes to ensure a broader and sustained impact. These efforts led to amendments to provincial law in Sindh making it a criminal offence for motorists not to give way to ambulances or to obstruct them. The ICRC and its partners in Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are working in close coordination with relevant authorities on legislative bills to enact comprehensive laws for protection of healthcare.

In a nutshell, the working approach of the ICRC and its partners for HClD in Pakistan involves exploring the nuances of violence against healthcare; transforming that understanding into tangible interventions; pursuing legislative and policy changes for wider and sustainable effects; engaging in advocacy and awareness efforts; and continuous evaluation to ensure relevance and course correction.

Measures for protection of healthcare have become all the more important considering the immense strain that COVID-19 places on overburdened healthcare systems. In Karachi, and the rest of Pakistan, the general emotions regarding healthcare during the pandemic ranged from initial outpourings of respect for healthcare workers to the later trends of violence. Working with meagre resources and running the risk of getting themselves and their family members infected, frontline healthcare workers responding to COVID-19 had to face violence of increasing intensity and frequency²⁵ while COVID-19 patients and their families faced stigmatisation.²⁶ Misinformation, misconceptions and rumours continued to make the rounds and erode the general community's trust in healthcare. The combined effects of the consequences of violence, the strains imposed by a novel pandemic and the pre-existing lack of resources can have devastating consequences for a healthcare system already struggling with many challenges.

Conclusion

The efforts to improve access to healthcare services in situations of urban violence can benefit from the lessons learnt during the ICRC's HClD experience in Karachi. It is important to direct such efforts on a foundation of solid understanding and evidence. Without informed decisions and going with the popular narrative, actions to improve access to healthcare in contexts of urban violence will risk walking into the trap of addressing superficial and peripheral factors. A needs-assessment based multi-disciplinary action addressing individual and collective behaviour, strengthening institutional and systemic measures, engaging communities, and building partnerships bridging ethnic, political and sectarian chasms will enable a comprehensive addressing of the gaps. Fostering local ownership, force multiplication through partnerships, mobilising local mandates, and tapping into existing expertise and commitment promise a sustainable action.

25 R.S. Martins, O.A. Bhatti, A.I. Mian (2020), 'Violence Against Health Care Workers in Pakistan During the COVID-19 Pandemic', *JAMA Health Forum*, October 19, 2020, available at <https://jamanetwork.com/channels/health-forum/fullarticle/2772156>.

26 B. Farmer and A. Yusufzai (2020), 'Families abandon dead relatives as Covid-19 fear and stigma grips Pakistan', *Telegraph* 6 June.

Preventing violence by remedying its causes

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In 2019, 149 people tragically lost their lives to violence in London – the highest level in ten years.¹ Many of those acts of violence may have been years in the making. Even more concerning is that a violent act committed today may form a significant part of the context for a future act of violence committed years later against someone completely unconnected to the original incident. In response to rising levels of violence, Violence Reduction Units (VRUs) are being established across the UK.² Preventing past or current traumas from giving rise to future violence is a key part of the London VRU's strategy.

If 'how can we stop violence?' is the question, then understanding the characteristics of violence is integral to the answer and interrogating and rebalancing the ecosystems within which it thrives is essential to preventing its recurrence. Reducing violence sustainably requires a public health approach that is place based, community led, and supported by cross sector partnerships. The VRU is a team comprising of experts from a range of backgrounds – local government, youth work, law enforcement, community engagement, and public health amongst others. It is from these diverse yet complementary perspectives that, in this essay, we argue that reducing violence in the long term is contingent on delivering carefully designed interventions that decrease the risk factors of vulnerable populations, address racial biases, and spread positive opportunities more widely. We will challenge what is understood by 'urban violence', ask what factors contribute to violence and who should be involved in remedying this, and highlight some of the nuances specific to London that are relevant to the efficacy of interventions, ultimately querying whether the systems in place are optimised to fulfil their purposes.

Violence does not occur in a vacuum. What people see, hear, and remember of serious violent incidents is usually only the tip of a deeply seated iceberg formed over years. A public health approach acknowledges that the majority of the iceberg lies hidden below the surface. This being so, a law-enforcement approach that targets only the visible manifestations of violence is unlikely to produce long-term results. Viewed holistically, violence is often a manifestation, or at least an indicator, of other underlying social problems – substance abuse, poverty, low educational attainment, high unemployment to name a few. Tackling violence necessitates concerted and evidenced efforts both to understand what lies beneath the surface, and then to find and deploy the best tools and approaches to chip away at it.

1 Metropolitan Police (2020), 'Homicide Victims in the MPS'. Available at <https://www.met.police.uk/sc/stats-and-data/met/homicide-dashboard/> [Accessed 16 July 2020].

2 Home Office (2019), 'Home Office allocates £35 million to police forces for violence reduction units' [Press release], 18 June 2019. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/home-office-allocates-35-million-to-police-forces-for-violence-reduction-units> [Accessed 10 November 2020].

‘Irresponsible reporting’ by the press³ has led politicians, the public, and police to focus on the weapons used. Sensationalist buzz-phrases like ‘knife crime’, ‘gun crime’, ‘acid attacks’ ‘conceal a more complex set of issues and explanations’⁴ that might reveal the reasons why anyone – especially a young person – would feel the need to arm themselves. Violence reduction approaches should aim to reduce all forms of violence by addressing the factors that lead up the exhibition of violent behaviour, whether aided by a weapon or not.

Problematically, the term ‘urban violence’ itself, whilst prima facie accurate for violence within an urban setting, has particularly loaded connotations in the UK context, where ‘urban’ is commonly used to describe cultures, genres of music and cinema, and neighbourhoods associated with Black communities (this despite Black people only making up 13% of London’s population). The term ‘urban violence’ in this context then evokes an association between Blackness and violence, further compounded by a national media focus on the types of violence disproportionately inflicted on young black men in the London area.

Moreover, the use of ‘urban’ as the adjectival descriptor of ‘violence’ places too great an emphasis on the city as the location of violence – implying that the nature of a city itself is the prevailing causative factor – at the expense of seeing violence as a consequence of a variety of factors that could be played out anywhere (and not always in public). Nonetheless, evidence from a report commissioned by the VRU suggests a place-based approach that focuses on hyperlocal factors within specific areas of a city can be useful.⁵

Although violence in London is not as prevalent as in some comparable cities, levels of the most serious violence are on the rise. Homicide rates have risen by 50% since 2014 when there were 93 cases.⁶ This has led to an acknowledgment that a new approach is needed, and inspiration for this new approach came from elsewhere in the UK – Scotland.

Public health approach

In 2005, a United Nations report named Scotland as the most violent country in the developed world.⁷ The same year, the World Health Organisation dubbed Glasgow the ‘murder capital of Europe’.⁸ Ten years later, non-sexual violent crimes had dropped from 14,728 to 6,272 per year, and homicides had more than halved from 165 to 81. Scotland’s innovative public health approach to violence reduction was spearheaded by its newly-created Violence Reduction Unit composed of police officers, experts, and people with lived experience of violence, alongside health, education, and social work partners. It has been credited with this success and for demonstrating that violence is preventable, not inevitable.

A public health approach involves readjusting the balance between prevention and enforcement in the former’s favour, and drawing on cross-sector partnerships to

3 G. Young and D. Gayle (2017), ‘Irresponsible reporting of knife crime “alienating young people”’, *Guardian*, 28 March. Available at <https://www.theguardian.com/membership/2017/mar/28/irresponsible-reporting-of-knife-alienating-young-people> [Accessed 11 July 2020].

4 P. Squires (2009), ‘The Knife Crime “Epidemic” and British politics’, *British Politics* Vol.4 No.1, 10.1057/bp.2008.40.

5 H. Wiesmann, M. Davies, O. Suggs, S. Davis and S. Ruda (2020), *Violence in London: what we know and how to respond*. Behavioural Insights Team. Available at: https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/bit_london_violence_reduction_final_31_january_2020_1.pdf

6 Metropolitan Police (2020). ‘Homicide Victims in the MPS’. Available at <https://www.met.police.uk/sd/stats-and-data/met/crime-data-dashboard>.

7 Anon. (2005). ‘Scotland worst for violence – UN’, *BBC*, 18 September. Available at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/scotland/4257966.stm> [Accessed 7 July 2020].

8 G. Seenan (2005), ‘Scotland has second highest murder rate in Europe’, *Guardian*, 26 September. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2005/sep/26/ukcrime.scotland> [Accessed 7 July 2020].

adopt a whole-system multi-agency approach to tackling and preventing serious violence locally. This opens up a space for nurturing rather than criminalisation, and for long-term proactive approaches rather than short-term reactive ones. It includes: identifying needs; using evidence of what works; involving communities; and delivering through partnerships. It recognises violence as being preventable, and suggests tackling its root causes both through addressing risk factors and through promoting protective factors.

Many violence and vulnerability risks and indicators coincide. Gangs have close links to serious youth violence and the violence against women and girls (VAWG) agenda, which is closely linked to the open drug markets and the exploitation of vulnerable young people to distribute drugs across the country, which all link to the wider need to reduce school exclusions and keep young people in education, and to better equip and recognise youth practitioners for a consistent approach.

These work themes have largely been addressed in silos (schools are a matter for education bodies, drug dealing is a matter for law enforcement agencies, youth work is a matter for local authorities). Effective violence reduction requires intervention at an early stage, through bodies working in partnerships that are transparent, and through approaches flexible enough to take unique circumstances into account. So long as silo working continues, early intervention through identification of needs is difficult.

A challenge for reducing violence relates to the interchangeability of terms such as violence and vulnerabilities. The VRU recognises the interchangeability of violence and vulnerabilities through ‘contextualising’ the issue of violence and supporting individuals as a whole person, in a whole family setting, as part of a wider contextual safeguarding, community-led approach. Many of these themes, terms, and approaches have been around for some time; however, all of them affirm the need for understanding the context surrounding the violence and those impacted.

The London VRU is therefore adopting a contextual approach to reducing violence, within a public health framework. A Serious Needs Assessment (SNA), published in 2019, sought to better understand the complexities of violence in London. The SNA revealed that neighbourhoods that have suffered the highest levels of violence are also likely to have higher levels of deprivation.⁹ Income deprivation is the strongest predictor of high violence in a specific neighbourhood. Interestingly, areas occupied by gangs today positively correlate to areas identified as poor in 1900, which hints at the chronically entrenched nature of some underlying risk factors for violence relating to low income, high unemployment, low educational attainment, and poor housing quality.

The term Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) refers collectively to traumatic events or chronic stressors experienced during childhood. ACEs can include direct physical, sexual, or emotional abuse, parental abandonment, witnessing substance abuse, and the incarceration of a household member.¹⁰ The distribution of ACEs in London broadly aligns with areas of affluence and deprivation. The link between deprivation and violence has been well established, meaning that a young person’s life chances, including the risk of losing their life, are determined by the conditions they’re born into.

9 Wieshmann et al., *Violence in London*.
10 House of Commons Science and Technology Committee. (2018). *Evidence-Based Early Years Intervention*. Available at: <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmsctech/506/506.pdf> [Accessed 11 July 2020].

To reduce violence across London we need to think about earlier interventions that encompass mitigating factors that are known to lead to harm, and broadening access to opportunities. Enabling universal services, such as early years settings and schools, to better support those who have experienced adversity could benefit those individuals directly, and the broader group indirectly, by improving cohesion and inclusion and providing opportunities for the secondary prevention of ACEs and trauma.

Traumas have been amplified by the 2020 coronavirus pandemic. Many young people in London will have experienced elevated levels of violence in the home, and anxieties regarding their safety, education, and employment prospects. More research is needed on why people from ethnic minority backgrounds have been dying of coronavirus at increased rates; however, whatever the reasons, many young people from poorer backgrounds have lost relatives to the virus. There was a marked rise in police exercising ‘stop and search’ powers in London during the height of the national lockdown in the spring of 2020.¹¹ With the public spectacle of these searches and the use of force, these searches (and the mere threat of them) could also be traumatic, especially for black communities and the young black men who are disproportionately subjected to them.

Recognising trauma, including racial and intergenerational traumas, as a risk factor that is a childhood adversity is an important area. The mental health effects of experiencing ACEs are largely known.¹² If left unaddressed, they can lead to psychological and even physiological changes that give rise to ‘disrupted neurodevelopment and social, emotional, and cognitive impairment’¹³ which can manifest as anti-social behaviours, including violence.

These structural and cultural traumas are exacerbated by service provision that often fails to acknowledge, let alone deal with, the racial element of trauma. A public health approach requires all partners to be conscious of these nuances that feel specific to this ‘urban’ setting, context, and time, and seek to embed appropriate interventions.

Saving lives costs money, violence costs even more

After the financial crash of 2008, the UK government aimed to reduce its fiscal deficit by cutting public sector spending. Deep cuts followed to public services such as community police support officers, youth clubs, and other support services. Areas that saw the largest cuts to youth services also saw some of the highest rises in violence involving knives.¹⁴

The published Youth Violence Commission’s Final Report concludes that cutting youth and family services to save money is a false economy. It is estimated that the cost of violence affecting young people will be £10 billion over the next ten years on top of the £11 billion it has already cost over the last 11 years.¹⁵ The financial cost

11 Metropolitan Police (2020), ‘Stop and Search Dashboard’. Available at: <https://www.met.police.uk/sd/stats-and-data/met/stop-and-search-dashboard/>. [Accessed 17 July 2020].

12 Centers For Disease Control and Prevention (2020), *About the CDC-Kaiser ACE Study*. Available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/aces/about.html> [Accessed 10 November 2020].

13 P. Aaltonen (2019), *Next steps for addressing adverse childhood events*. Available at: <https://www.thenationshealth.org/content/49/6/3.1> [Accessed 10 November 2020].

14 N. Smith (2020), *Securing a brighter future: The role of youth services in tackling knife crime*. Available at: <http://www.preventknifecrime.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Securing-a-brighter-future-the-role-of-youth-services-in-tackling-knife-crime-v.2.pdf> [Accessed 10 November 2020].

15 K. Irwin-Rodgers, A. Muthoo and L. Billingham (2020), *Youth Violence Commission Final Report*. Available at: <http://yvcommission.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/YVC-Final-Report-July-2020.pdf> [Accessed 17 July 2020].

of violence to London was put at £3 billion in 2019,¹⁶ however the emotional cost to those close to the victims is unquantifiable.

With funds limited, and a large area and population of over 9 million residents to serve, a place-based approach is likely to be the most effective. The SNA found that violence in London is geographically concentrated in specific neighbourhoods of up to 3,000 residents.¹⁷ If violence in London is concentrated within small neighbourhoods, then a localised approach that focuses on building strong, resilient, and cohesive communities is necessary. However, these communities are also likely to experience the legacy of trauma that violence often perpetuates, so they also need to be supported with quality therapeutic offers to break the cycle of trauma that many endure.¹⁸

The future

If violence is indeed seen as an indicator of deeper social maladies, then not only do the affected individuals require support, society itself needs remedying.

In a global metropolis like London, strong sociocultural norms are not overturned overnight. Although challenging, norms pertaining to violence need to be reset. Acts of violence in the home used to be more commonplace, and were treated as a domestic issue rather than a legal one. Now there is cultural condemnation of such acts, underpinned by new or strengthened laws.

Social structures need to be re-examined and inbuilt biases dismantled if taxpayer-funded institutions are to deliver services that are culturally competent for a city that is 61% non-white British, speaks over 300 languages, and is majority non-Christian. Serious questions must be answered: by the educational system that, in some parts of the country, permanently excludes schoolchildren of Caribbean backgrounds at nearly three times the rate of their white peers;¹⁹ by the police, who are four times more likely to stop and search a black person, and four times more likely to use force against black people than white people;²⁰ and by the judicial system, when black and Asian offenders are 50% more likely than a white person to receive immediate custodial sentences for similar drug offences.²¹ These imbalances extend to representation in parliament and the media.

If these social structures are not fit for their local purpose, the risk is that rather than being forces that address social ills, they actually become agents that fuel and compound further violence against the marginalised, repeating traumas, and entrenching the very stereotypes that keep the marginalised excluded from mainstream society.

Any agency tasked with reducing violence should be constantly reviewing evidence on what is effective. Just as important is acknowledging where knowledge gaps exist and working out how best to fill them. We do not yet know enough about the role

16 Wieshmann et al. *Violence in London*.

17 Ibid.

18 E. Williams, E. Iyere, B. Lindsay, C. Murray and Z. Ramadhan (2020), *Therapeutic Intervention for Peace (TIP Report): Culturally Competent Responses to Serious Youth Violence in London*. Available at: <https://www.powerthefight.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/TIP-final-report.pdf> [Accessed 10 November 2020].

19 Department for Education (2020), 'Permanent and fixed-period exclusions in England: 2018 to 2019'. Available at: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/permanent-and-fixed-period-exclusions-in-england> [Accessed 10 November 2020].

20 S. Francis, T. Welsh and Z. Adesina (2020), 'Met Police "four times more likely" to use force on black people', *BBC News London*, 30 July. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-53407560>. [Accessed 10 November 2020].

21 A. Issac (2020), 'Investigating the association between an offender's sex and ethnicity and the sentence imposed at the Crown Court for drug offences'. Sentencing Council. Available at: <https://www.sentencingcouncil.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Sex-and-ethnicity-analysis-final-1.pdf> [Accessed 10 November 2020].

social media plays in amplifying and publicising conflict and traumas, nor about how visions of lavishly curated lifestyles online affect young people's own aspirations and decision-making. We do not yet know enough about the relative importance to young people of key relations – like social workers, teachers, faith leaders, and youth practitioners – as protective factors against violence. The impact of violence on girls, racial trauma as a driver, and the comparative benefits of culturally competent services are all areas that we would like to see researched further.

In spite of knowledge gaps, it is clear that if violence is to be stopped, then the causes need serious investigation, the breadth of the challenge shouldn't be underestimated, and the long-term nature of the task must be understood. From that starting point, there is every reason to believe that – if done right – Londoners will enjoy a city that is better, fairer, and safer for all.

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