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Gangs, Guns, and the City: Urban Policy in Dangerous Places

Gareth A. Jones & Dennis Rodgers

Abstract

There is growing interest in the impact of violence on development and on 'security' as a policy response. But, academics and policy institutions seem split on how to approach cities, either ignoring them completely or representing them as inherently violent spaces. Yet historically, many people across the world have moved to cities – and continue to do so – for safety, and studies have moreover highlighted how there often exist specific patterns regarding who perpetrates violence, who are its victims, and where violence takes place in cities. To consider this putative paradox, this chapter draws inspiration from two sources. First, we consider the ways in which urban contexts have been considered in relation to major violence reduction and pacification processes. The city has arguably become a key site for contemporary innovations in "security governance" by both public and private agencies, yet it is generally not recognised as anything other than an unproblematic spatial locale. Second, we problematise universalising assumptions about cities, more specifically considering research on gangs, in order to expose how "urban violence" is generally predicated on quite specific conditions that pertain to social, political and economic conditions within cities, which often manifest themselves in particular spatial urban configurations. A final section offers some tentative conclusions.

Introduction

Over the past decade, a host of publications have examined the relationship between (under)development, security and violence (e.g. Buur *et al.*, 2007; DFID 2007; Keen, 2008; World Bank, 2010 & 2011). International development agencies in particular have become concerned by the "the challenge of repeated cycles of violence" and evidence indicating that new forms of conflict are emerging with the potential to become linked to each other in ways that are very difficult to control, especially in "fragile" contexts (World Bank, 2011: 276 & 2). A basic premise of many such studies is that poverty, as well as unemployment, income shocks, rapid urbanisation and weak institutions enhance the risks of violence. Violence, in turn, makes development more difficult, suggesting to one influential figure that we need to understand conflict as "development in reverse" (Collier *et al.*, 2003: 13) and "accept the links between security and development outcomes" (World Bank, 2011: 31). On this last point there seems to be a broad consensus, leading some to claim that addressing poverty is impossible without first creating the conditions to control conflict (Collier, 2010; World Bank, 2011).

A great many of the ideas that form part of the 'security-development' debate are both original and audacious. Nevertheless, a notable but underreported feature of most of these studies is that they either pay no attention to urbanisation and cities, or conceptualise cities as sites of particular forms of violence but without providing a detailed examination of how urban space and violence are related. The 2011 *World Development Report* (hereafter, WDR), for example, refers rather loosely to 'urban' as a seemingly generic locale inhabited by "over 1.5 billion people", yet characterises the equally vague 'rapid urbanisation' as undermining 'social cohesion'.[1] Differently, and despite adopting the definition of violence as "political violence" common to political science and development studies, Collier (2010) ignores cities in his analysis of the relationship between violence and democracy, despite the proven historical correlation between cities and democratisation (Borja and Castells, 1997; Dyson, 2001).[2] One consequence of ignoring or treating cities in particular ways is underplaying the social dimensions of violence which often come to the fore in cities.[3]

In the first part of this chapter, therefore, we explore how violence and cities have been understood, including in ways that consider violence to be related to urbanisation or urban form. In exploring this relationship we aim to complement the call made by Parnell (this volume) to emphasise the materiality of the built form and the structural role of 'the city'. We echo Parnell's claim is that we need to "bring 'the city' back into urban poverty studies" by suggesting that we need to re-situate the city in to studies of violence as conceived by development policy institutions. In so doing, policy might also be more effective at understanding and addressing urban poverty, as it should come as little surprise that violence disproportionately affects the poorest and makes the places where they live, work and relax more difficult to intervene in.

In the second part of the chapter, however, we question the association between security and development. Drawing from an example of what we call "security governance" – the *Unidade de Policía Pacíficadora* programme (UPP) in Rio de Janeiro – we argue for greater attention to how security is to be achieved in complex urban environments and what form and for whom development is said to take place and at whose expense. Finally, we discuss the problematic nature of contemporary policy studies that do not adequately understand the specific relationship between cities and violence, and even more importantly, the form that this leads violence to take. We demonstrate this through a consideration of research on a paradigmatic form of urban violence, gangs, in order to show how the phenomenon is generally predicated on specific conditions that pertain to social, political and economic conditions within cities, which furthermore manifest themselves along particular spatial urban configurations. A final section offers some tentative conclusions.

Urbanisation and violence

In contrast to the aspatial approach of much work concerned with 'security and development', there exists a long-standing concern in the social sciences that urbanisation amplifies the salience of violence (Wirth, 1938). More recently, there is a sense in which cities are increasingly understood as key sites of violence, as well as of the failure of development and/or political processes, in the contemporary world (Beall, 2006; Beall *et al.*, 2013; Brennan-Galvin, 2002; Davis, 2006; Goldstone, 2002; Rodgers, 2009). The fact that much recent conflict, terrorism, and civil disorder has occurred in cities such as Beirut, Baghdad, Mumbai, and Nairobi, or that the world's highest homicide rates afflict cities in Colombia, Central America, South Africa, or, most recently, Mexico, has become ever more noted, and has clearly added to the ubiquitous notion that cities and violence are intimately related. Nevertheless, many studies are vague, and often quite contradictory, on how urbanisation and violence combine, and how causation might be

understood. The relationship between urbanisation, social cohesion and violence is a case in point.

The 2011 WDR notes that social cohesion is generally lower where urbanisation is most rapid, claiming that this was the case in Latin America in the past, and Asia and Africa today. Cohesion is deemed to be broken down by structural inequality, unemployment, and access to drugs and firearms, which makes people vulnerable to gangs and criminal groups (World Bank, 2011: 7), all of which are issues that can intuitively be related to the specificities of urban contexts. The claim that social cohesion is affected by urbanisation prompts support for civil society-state partnerships and 'community policing' initiatives as responses to violence (World Bank, 2010).[4] Yet, a range of studies have dismissed the idea that the incidence or severity of disorder and violence are simply related to the magnitude or pace of urbanisation *per se* (Buhaug and Urdal, 2013; Fox and Hoelscher, 2012). According to Buhaug and Urdal (2013), the "urbanization bomb" might be a "dud".[5] Indeed, there has long been a case that "rapid urbanisation", properly managed, might make a positive contribution to 'security' and safety. Indeed, Samuel Huntington famously argued in the aftermath of the Tet offensive in Vietnam that an "American-sponsored urban revolution" presented a critical opportunity for "winning the war" by weakening the Viet Cong's rural support base (1968: 650, 652). In other words, rather than instability and conflict being about the pace of urbanisation, concentrating people in cities not only made them easier to control, but also potentially undermined revolution as aspirations for modernisation were met.

The contrast between today's fear of urbanisation and the optimism for modernisation of the past could not be starker. An emerging strand of research has focused on the relation between urbanisation and economic conditions, and more specifically the fact that while living standards may be greater in cities and governance is generally better, in states with low capacity and/or

faltering economic growth, the demand for violence may increase as aspirations go unmet and material conditions are put at risk where large numbers of people reside in a bounded environment (e.g. Beall *et al.*, 2013; Cole and Gramajo, 2009; Goldstone, 2002; Urdal, 2012; World Bank, 2010). Three inter-related issues can broadly be said to have focussed most attention in this respect: namely, poverty and inequality; the 'youth bulge'; and the strength of political institutions.

A prominent claim is the direct connection between violence and urban poverty, often made in relation to the global increase in slums, which a 2007 report by the United Nations Office for West Africa for example portrayed as hotspots of crime and violence (UNOWA, 2007). Associated with these spaces especially, is the fear that a demographic 'bulge' of young men with few opportunities to attain worthwhile jobs, despite educational attainment, and disenchanted with conventional outlets to vent their frustration, will be susceptible to "fundamentalism, terrorism, insurgency and migration" (Huntington 1996: 103; Fearon, 2011; but see Urdal, 2006). Pointing to rising material inequalities, frustration provoked by media images of consumer goods that prove unattainable and the retreat of states, Rapley (2006: 95) argues that contemporary cities herald a "new medievalism" in which slums and ghettoes provide "variegated informal and quasi-informal state-like activities". This free-flow of cause-effect relies on a putative urban ecology that determines violence with particular spaces and therefore resident archetypes rather than unpacking the relationship of violence to issues of power within cities.

And the dystopian associations extend even further. Marking a shift of concern with fragile or failed states to failed cities, Richard Norton (2003: 97) has famously suggested the imminent possibility of future cities as "feral" spaces, "sprawling urban environments [that are] now a vast collection of blighted buildings, an immense petri dish of both ancient and new diseases, a

territory where the rule of law has long been replaced by near anarchy in which the only security available is that which is attained through brutal power". In this diagnosis, portions of a city are controlled by "criminals, armed resistance groups, clans, tribes, or neighbourhood associations" with, again, the suggestion that slums are an especially auspicious space for such take-over (Norton, 2003: 98; see also Rapley, 2006). A feral city would be a "magnet" for terrorist organisations interested in exploiting the protection afforded by the absence of policing and the possible connections to illegal international trade and communication. Grading cities according to their likelihood for 'ferality' from Green (Healthy) to Yellow (Marginal) to Red (Going Feral), the suggestion is that the future violence will be urban-based but beyond the control of states at that level.

This association of cities with violence, much of it perpetrated by non-state actors, at possibly increasing rates and in 'irregular' forms, have promoted a sense of cities as actually or quasi militarised spaces, "urban terrains" and "battlespaces" (Graham, 2010). Within this space 'policing' has given way to 'security', characterised by the greater involvement of private security agencies, and also underpinning grand claims about 'national security' which justify the greater direct involvement of military agencies in city life (Abrahamsen and Williams, 2011; Samara, 2011). This "security governance" marks a shift from more classic forms of urban governance predicated on being about broader societal development; instead it is now about the achievement of "security". Thought of as a spectrum of practices, security governance in cities involves discreet projects of urban design for crime prevention that may complement measures to privatise access to public space and use of surveillance, through to community policing, zero-tolerance and the deployment of forces trained in counter-insurgency (see Graham, 2010). While cities such as New York, Los Angeles and Paris perhaps led the way with such urban 'security' innovations in the past, it is now cities of the Global South that are considered the laboratories for

such measures, including for example the infamous *Mano Dura* anti-gang measures in Central America, or the "security partnerships" in South Africa (Bénit-Gbaffou, *et al.*, 2008; Felbab-Brown, 2011; Jütersonke *et al.*, 2009).

Cities, security and pacification

One of the best known contemporary examples of urban crime and violence prevention is Rio de Janeiro's Urban Pacification Programme. The programme has been praised by the World Bank - explicitly so in the 2011 WDR - and UN-Habitat - which has featured it prominently on its webpage and appears to have supported it financially.[6] Begun in 2008 with the deployment of specially trained Police Pacification Units (*Unidade de Policía Pacíficadora,* UPP) in the city's favelas the UPP appeared to be different from the previous practices of the military police and condoned actions of *milicia* (militia) mostly formed of serving or former police and military to 'clean up' areas controlled by gangs known as 'commando', criminal organisations and political opponents. Drawing some inspiration from measures taken in Medellin and methods deployed by US forces in Iraq, as well as the experience from previous policing projects in Rio, the programme has used army units and special military police – the *Batalhão de Operações Policiais Especiais*, or BOPE – to occupy a favela (intervention phase), before introducing UPP officers (stabilisation), and finally establishing state and private infrastructure and social projects (consolidation phase). The UPP claims legitimacy as a break with past policing practice and ideology, and the explicit aim to deliver security and development initiatives (Jones and Rodgers, 2011). It is argued that unlike previous attempts to 'integrate Rio' or 'normalise' the favela through upgrading projects the UPP makes favela residents (*favelados*) into full citizens and 'reclaims' state sovereignty over the 'ungoverned' spaces of the city (Muggah and Souza Mulli, 2012). Following Huntington (1968) and Scott (1998), one might argue that pacification renders the favela a "legible" space, one in which the state and private sector can therefore act.

We do not deny that the UPP has had considerable support from residents of Rio (*cariocas*) and especially, at least in its earliest years, from favelados (see Cano, 2012; Costa Vargas, 2013). Observers have commended the unusual degree of coordination between state agencies, and the tri-partisan support from national, state and municipal officials. The extension of the programme from an initial three favelas in 2008-9 to 12 by 2010 and 36 by the end of 2013 has also been welcomed as a sign of state commitment beyond the immediacy of electoral cycles. The extension also served to deflect criticism that UPP was intended to 'lock-down' only those favela closest to middle- and high-income neighbourhoods, possibly only for the duration of the FIFA World Cup and Olympics, by which time 100 UPP interventions were promised (see Jones and Rodgers, 2011: 989-991). There was also considerable surprise that the intervention phases were carried out without significant bloodshed; faced with overwhelming force the commandos tended to withdraw. Moreover, in the aftermath of the intervention and stabilisation phases the homicide rates appeared to fall and general perceptions of safety improved (Cano, 2012; Muggah and Souza Mulli, 2012).[7] Finally, there was evidence in the first-phase of new policing practices being undertaken by specially recruited and trained officers, which contrasted strongly with the generally brutal tactics of the past. UPP officers were seen patrolling favela streets and a clever public relations campaign represented them taking time to talk with favelados, engage with community groups, and participate in *baile funk* parties, cultural events and festivals.[8]

Nevertheless, the experience of UPP also illustrates the difficulties of delivering 'security and development' in the complex social, political and economic context of cities. A first problem relates to the institutional capacity of the state. The fast-paced roll-out of the programme has put strain on the quality of training, undermining the important perception that policing during stabilisation and consolidation would be qualitatively different from the old regime (Teixeira,

2011). The commitment to pay UPP more than regular officers has put the policing budget under pressure and raised questions about the sustainability of the commitment to officer-intensive community policing (Freeman, 2012). It was clear during field visits to Complexo do Alemão and Rocinha, 'pacified' in 2010 and 2011 respectively, that the UPP-marked cars contained regular military police and the territory of the much-praised foot patrols was restricted to areas of major infrastructure, new public housing in Rocinha and the cable car stations in Alemão. These 'community' patrols were highly armed units that seemed more like 'security' intent on governing key spaces and actors rather than working with residents and the often delicate balance of interests that mark favela economies, politics and social lives (Cano, 2012).[9]

Second, a rationale of the UPP has been to establish state presence in 'secured' favela as a means to enhance economic integration and development. But the nature of this integration and its benefits to residents is in much doubt. As Freeman (2012) has recorded, the intervention of the BOPE in some favela has been followed in as little as 24 hours by teams removing illegal utility hook-ups, and then a day or so later by representatives from banks and credit providers, chain stores, telephone, entertainment and utility companies encouraging people to sign up to new services (also Costa Vargas, 2013). These practices expose a contested interface between the claims to community policing on the one hand, and a strategy to open a space for intervention by private capital on the other. This tension surfaced long before the demonstrations of 2013 and 2014, as the state initiated large-scale infrastructural projects in a number of pacified favela. The most famous intervention is the US$250 million *teleférico*, a cable car system that connects five hilltops in the Complexo do Alemão, and which have been followed by other projects in Mangueira and Providencia.[10] In Alemão the cable car delivers some benefits to the local population, but offers a weak match-up with pedestrian patterns, links with shops and schools, and closes early in the evening. The officially promoted 12,000 journeys each day for a favela

complex with an estimated 100,000 plus population also suggests a modest ‘revealed demand’, and an inappropriate service priority for an area that at the time was without a major health facility and adequate school provision.[11]

Although investment in favelas represent a significant allocation of public funds – upwards of US$550 million between 2008-2012 – against the sums devoted to other projects, the poorest areas of Rio receive less than 20% of the infrastructure budget, excluding the sum allocated to new and remodelled stadia (Felbab-Brown, 2011). However, it is the nature and alleged purpose of these investments that has prompted controversy and conflict. In Providencia, the teleférico addresses – without having seemingly consulted with - a long-standing community complaint about the quality of the steps leading from the base of the hill to the top. But, the teleférico has been part of a project of large-scale demolition both to construct pylons and open spaces for the installation of private and public facilities: upwards of 800 houses have been identified for demolition (Freeman, 2012). The remodelling of the favela overall is an attempt to connect Providencia to the Puerto Maravilla, the largest investment project in the city that has involved the massive transfer of public land to private developers, sunk large sums of public money and involved mass displacement (Limas Carlos, 2010). In a number of favela there is evidence of rapidly rising real estate prices and rents, displacement of residents, some by force, and claims that ‘development’ has led to gentrification (Freeman, 2012; Muggah and Souza Mulli, 2012).

Third, a more subtle difficulty with the pacification approach relates to how it considers the social, economic and political relations between the state, favela residents and gangs. In common with many security initiatives, the UPP regards these various institutions as distinct from one another, as broadly having different agendas, and being competitors for legitimacy and resources. Pacification entails the state, through the police, replacing gangs and other agents as the

legitimate organisations for the distribution of public services (Souza Mulli, cited in Jones and Rodgers, 2011: 989). This strategy depends on the BOPE and then UPP disrupting local networks of power, including the ability of the gangs to provide stability to residents and promise of social mobility to members (see Carvalho and Soares, 2013; Misse 2007). However, while the representation of police action against the commandos, assisted by careful media use, relies on a lawless favela being 'retaken' by a professional, strategic, and public security initiative, the reality is far more complex (Costa Vargas, 2013; Robb Larkins, 2013). Police informants warn commandos of upcoming actions, residents often fear police as much as gangs, violence often increases after police take-over, and captured gang members may be 'hostaged' by police to rivals (see Arias, 2013). As Penglase (2009) puts it, conditions of insecurity are co-produced. Considered in terms of certainty, reliability, and 'reasonableness' against prevailing norms, legitimate justice is consequently not necessarily the preserve of the police and state, even if people's actual 'security' under commandos relies as much on myth and fear as on fair-dealing in practice (Arias and Rodrigues, 2006; Penglase, 2009).

The unfolding experience of the favela 'pacification' poses a number of dilemmas for how we might better understand violence and the city. It suggests that the objectives of 'security governance' are not unambiguously about exerting state sovereignty, extending the rule of law, and making the city secure for all. Not only is security governance through the UPP partial and uneven over space, but its effects, including its benefits, are not evenly felt. Costa Vargas (2013) suggests that UPP has continued the long-standing practice of conflating blackness with danger and violence, and therefore targeted spaces occupied by mostly black, and poorer, people. Indeed, Rio might be seen as part of a larger process whereby neoliberal forms of governance conceive of "inclusion" as a set of managed "exclusions" (Samara, 2011). In rendering the favela secure, legible and a space for 'development', the UPP also involves significant uncertainty about what

types of change are envisaged, their sustainability, and who will gain from the process. Security governance is predicated on simple arrangements of legitimate and illegitimate forms of violence, and violent actors, and relations with residents and local institutions. Yet, on the ground, common sense clear-cut distinctions between state-slum, police-gang, and security-violence are not so evident. Arrangements are blurred, people's social relations and economic interests complicate simple analytic binaries and policy prescriptions (Arias, 2013; Penglase, 2009).

Unpacking violence and the city: The gang considered

It is striking that in most discussions about the UPP not only is the city as a particular type of space never reflected upon directly, but moreover, there is little specific consideration of the violence that the UPP is actually tasked with reducing, namely gang violence. This is all the more surprising considering that gangs emerge as major bugbears in the studies of development agencies, to the extent that they are repeatedly invoked in an almost talismanic manner, as a short-hand means of describing the threatening "other". In the case of the WDR, gangs are even lumped together with other very different violent actors such as drug cartels, terrorists, or rebel groups.[12] While young people's motivations for joining gangs or rebel groups may hold some conceptual similarities, presenting things in this manner clearly reinforces the notion that two very different types of violence are analogous, and concomitantly that they should be dealt with in similar ways.

Although as John Hagedorn (2008: xxv) has pointed out, "today's youth gang might become a drug posse tomorrow, even transform into an ethnic militia or a vigilante group the next day", this is by no means inevitable, and moreover these groups have fundamentally different logics and dynamics (see also Jones and Rodgers, 2009; Hazen and Rodgers, 2014). To this extent, lumping them all under the same category is clearly potentially dangerous. Even if the WDR only

associates gangs and rebel groups on the basis of their origins, it is only a small step to connect them in terms of their motives and objectives, and while rebel groups may or may not be political organisations, they generally have at least at a rhetorical level the objective of overthrowing a government and seizing state power, something which can rarely – if ever – be associated with gangs.[13] More importantly, such an approach to gangs also clearly constructs them in a de-contextualised manner. As a long-standing and venerable social scientific literature has explored in detail, however, if we are truly to get to grips with gangs, it is critical to understand the context within which they emerge. Certainly, research has consistently offered two major insights into the nature of gangs. On the one hand, they are fundamentally epiphenomenal social formations, and on the other, they are inherently urban in nature. Both of these aspects of gangs are more often than not ignored in policy circles which prefers to offer gangs as a universal narrative trope, ubiquitously emergent actors that highlight the necessity of linking development with security.

In his pioneering study of the phenomenon, however, Chicago School sociologist Frederic Thrasher (1927: 487) paradigmatically suggested that "the gang and its problems constitute …one of many symptoms of the more or less general disorganization incident to …the rapid growth of cities and all the internal process of kaleidoscopic movement and rearrangement which this growth has entailed". Indeed, Thrasher (1927: 26 & 37-38) argued that "the beginnings of the gang can best be studied in the slums of the city where an inordinately large number of children are crowded into a limited area. …Such a crowded environment is full of opportunities for conflict", which "coupled with deterioration in housing, sanitation, and other conditions of life in the slum, give the impression of general disorganization and decay". In a manner clearly reminiscent of Louis Wirth's (1938) famous analysis of "urbanism as a way of life", Thrasher contended that such conditions provoked social breakdown and anomie that in turn led to the emergence of "an inevitable repertoire of predatory activities and a universe of discourse

reflecting the disorganized social environment", most obviously manifest in the existence of gangs (1927: 257).

Thrasher's research is by no means the only study inherently linking urban contexts and violent phenomena such as gangs. Second generation Chicago School gang researchers such as Clifford Shaw and Henry McKay (1942) or William Foote Whyte (1943), for example, also identified this relationship as key in their studies of gangs, and the same is true of many subsequent gang researchers who are not associated with the Chicago School. Invoking just a few examples, Claude Fischer (1975: 1328) pointed out that there needed to be a "critical mass" of youth within any given population for a viable delinquent gang culture to emerge, and that this could only come about through population concentration in cities. Albert Cohen (1955), on the other hand, contended that gangs were sub-cultural institutional arrangements that reflected the cultural isolation and alienation of urban lower class youth from mainstream society. Martin Sánchez Jankowski (1991) for his part depicts gangs as institutional vehicles for economic enterprise that result from the intense competition over scarce resources in low-income urban areas.

Much of this gang research however arguably simultaneously undermines the notion that there exists an inherent relationship between urban contexts and violence. Many of the gangs that Thrasher studied were ethnic in nature, which contradicts the idea that violence emerges as a result of the superficiality and anonymity of urban social relations, insofar as it suggests that gangs can be based on elementary forms of social connection. Thrasher (1927: 30) attempts to explain this paradox by suggesting that the actions of social agents cannot go beyond their individual experiences, and that gangs therefore had to have their "beginning[s] in acquaintanceship and intimate relations which have already developed on the basis of some common interest". In addition to ethnicity, he thus also lists kinship and feelings of local

neighbourhood belonging as basic vectors for gang formation, all of which have also been highlighted by other gang researchers in a range of locations around the world (see Hazen and Rodgers, 2014, for an overview).

In many ways this is not surprising, however. Anthropologists have provided us with a plethora of studies of neighbourhoods, *favelas*, *barrios*, or *quartiers* in cities around the world that describe how urbanites effectively reproduce small-scale community forms of living within urban contexts by interacting repeatedly with relatively small numbers of individuals, moreover within a normally localised territory. As Oscar Lewis (1965: 497) put it, "social life is not a mass phenomenon" but "occurs for the most part in small groups", and therefore "any generalizations about the nature of social life in the city must be based on careful studies of these smaller universes rather than on a priori statements about the city as a whole". While this makes eminent sense, it also suggests that it is important to examine the underlying nature of gang violence more closely in order to truly understand the way that the phenomenon articulates with urban life in general, and the city in particular.

Understanding the political economy of violence in the city: The gang reconsidered

Thrasher (1927: 22-23) justifies focusing on slums by arguing that they constitute "geographically …interstitial area[s] in the city", and that just as "in nature foreign matter tends to collect and cake in every crack, crevice, and cranny", so "*life*, rough and untamed" materialises in the interstitial areas that constitute "fissures and breaks in the structure of social organization". Gangs, from this perspective, are "rich in elemental social processes significant to the student of society and human nature" (Thrasher, 1927: 3), because they represent an unmediated form of life, a primordial reflection of the violence that inherently bubbles under the surface of things and inevitably erupts at points where the social fabric is weak. Such a perception of violence

manifesting itself when social order breaks down clearly constitutes the phenomenon as something that exists outside of the social order. Although this kind of thinking is part of a long tradition, which perhaps finds its most obvious expression in Thomas Hobbes' (1996 [1651]) classic argument that violence is an incipient facet of being human in a state of nature that is held in check by the establishment of an encompassing social order, it is a viewpoint that also naturalises violence by projecting it as an autonomously pre-existing phenomenon that comes to the fore organically and automatically as a result of the existence or absence of certain objective conditions. For Hobbes, this was the absence of the Leviathan, but in relation to Thrasher's framework, it was the existence of cities, or at least of the particular social relations that he associated with the spatial characteristics of cities as anomic, disorganised social spaces.

When seen from this perspective, it can be argued that urban space is not necessarily violent *per se*, but rather constitutes a particular type of territorial space with intrinsic characteristics that naturally unleash the violence inherent to being human. As David Harvey (1973) points out in his classic work on *Social Justice and the City*, however, the notion of space is not only concerned with the territorial environment, but is also fundamentally about social relations. The gang literature once again provides us with an interesting window onto this, including Philippe Bourgois' (1995) ethnographic study of drug-dealing gangs in East Harlem, for example. This presents a nuanced analysis of the gang phenomenon that balances economic motivations and individual choices with structural constraints, showing how the Puerto Rican gangs that he studied could be understood in terms of a mixture of local resource distribution, cultural identity, and implicit political resistance. Bourgois describes in great detail how gang violence was an instrumental means to protect markets, enforce contracts, and ensure that the local drug economy ran smoothly in order to provide for neighbourhood inhabitants in a context of limited resources, and how it built on local cultural norms and networks. But he also ultimately links the emergence

of gangs to the way in which the wider urban labour market effectively condemned the inhabitants of poor neighbourhoods to dead-end jobs, which made joining drug-dealing gangs a logical aspiration, particularly for youth rejecting the low-grade options on offer to them. In doing so, Bourgois highlights how gangs in East Harlem emerged not just as instrumental adaptations to a context of limited resources, but also very much as responses to a broader context of limited *access* to resources within a broader city context characterised by extreme socio-economic marginalisation.

Bourgois thereby suggests that gangs are not a natural ecological feature of a city's spatial form, but rather epiphenomena of a very specific broader order, which he labels a context of "urban apartheid". In doing so, he draws attention to an active and purposeful process of segregation occurring between the inner city and the rest of New York. At the same time, however, he also comments how if inner city neighbourhoods such as East Harlem represent "the United States' greatest domestic failing, hanging like a Damocles sword over the larger society", "ironically, the only force preventing this suspended sword from falling is that drug dealers, addicts, and street criminals internalize their rage and desperation", and "direct their brutality against themselves and their immediate community rather than against their structural oppressors". The reasons for this are a complex "mesh of political-economic structural forces, historical legacies, cultural imperatives, and individual actions" (Bourgois, 1995: 318), but in the final analysis reflect the fact that gangs are desperate forms of social mobilisation, whether viewed from a micro or a macro perspective. Locally, the fact that they are limited institutions means that they can only benefit a minority within the ghetto, while at the macro level they simply do not have the strength to challenge the city-wide system of oppression, which is backed by an extensive apparatus of power and control. Seen from this perspective, it can be argued that it is this latter form of

structural subjugation that is ultimately the most devastating type of urban violence that can afflict cities.

This is something that Steffen Jensen (2008, 2014) similarly explores in the context of the Cape Flats in South Africa. Drawing also on the work of Pinnock (1984), he first traces the origins of the contemporary Cape Town gang phenomenon to the destruction of traditional neighbourhood ties due to the forcibly relocation of centrally-located coloured communities to the Cape Flats during the Apartheid era. He then goes on to point out that a major difference between past and present gangs is that the former had previously roamed throughout the (inner) city, while the latter now find themselves spatially isolated within the Flats, and notes how this changed patterns of gang violence, including in particular leading to more brutal forms of gang warfare. This, Jensen argues, has permitted a more repressive form of policing, through a dual process of stigmatisation of particular urban figures such as the "*skollie*" as well as more targeted forms of both public and private security. Deborah Levenson (2013: 75 & 104) makes a similar point in her study of Guatemalan gangs, tracing how the country's conflict to post-conflict transition led to a continuation of the 30-year civil war by other means, including a securitisation of urban life that transformed gangs from social constitutive institutions that were "rich in life, ambiguities, creativities, and contradictions… [that] had the possibility of developing in different directions, for better or worse" to "victim[s] of a system of dispositions that reproduced war without the war, …a target".

In some cases, the very urban fabric of the city itself can become the means for repression, as Dennis Rodgers (2004, 2009, 2012) highlights in his work on urban violence in post-revolutionary Nicaragua. More specifically, he shows how the urban development of Managua over the past two decades has been largely linked to securitisation concerns, with particular forms

of road-building actively constituting a form of "infrastructural violence" that aims at isolating poor neighbourhoods in order to contain crime – and more specifically gang violence – within them, and has led to a concomitant intensification of violence within these areas, as well as a shift in the underlying nature of gangs, which has shift from being solidaristic with their local neighbourhoods to predatory. Rodgers (2008, 2012) further traces how this elite-oriented process is underpinned by a particular oligarchic political economy that is fundamentally reflected in the city's morphology, thereby highlighting how urban violence is ultimately always a function of broader socio-political structures rather than a "natural" phenomenon.

This is a phenomena that emerges very clearly from a historical perspective, with gangs frequently emerging as major indices of regimes of injustice, which often become especially apparent in urban contexts where process of power, inequality, and oppression are both more intense and can become more visible. This is something that is apparent in Andrew Davies' (2013: 393-94) recent study of Glasgow gangs in the 1920 and 1930s – significantly called *City of Gangs* – where he notes that "the history of Glasgow's gangs ...reminds us that crime does not exist on the margins of urban life ...It is ...no coincidence that gangs were embedded in districts characterised by high levels of economic and social deprivation. It is no coincidence, either, that gangs formed deeper roots in Glasgow than in other British cities during the 1920s and 1930s. Deindustrialisation was more acute, and more sudden, in Glasgow than elsewhere, while the city's enduring sectarian antagonisms provided recurrent incendiary sparks." Davies goes on to contend that "it is also no coincidence that the most optimistic stories to emerge from Glasgow ...stemmed from attempts to work with – rather than against – young people in the city's poorest districts", and as such, he reminds us that in the final analysis it is not so much that development is a function of security, but rather that security is a function of development.

Conclusion

Despite the empirical and theoretical evidence in favour of approaches that take questions of political economy into account, the vision that violence is an inherent feature of urban contexts continues to be extremely persistent. The World Bank's 2011 WDR is in many ways a paradigmatic exemplification of this kind of conceptualisation, which it achieves by actively not considering the relationship between the city and violence in anything other than a vague and impressionistic manner, relying on sensationalistic narrative tropes about gangs rather than empirically-based analysis to press the point that cities are violent spaces. One possible reason for this is that a framework projecting violence as a naturalised feature of cities effectively obscures and shifts the blame away from the pernicious socio-political urban regimes that are often at the root of violence in cities.

As this chapter has sought to demonstrate, urban violence is generally predicated on quite specific conditions pertaining to the particular social, political and economic processes that manifest themselves within cities. Their variable articulation gives rise to a range of different spatial morphologies and urban governance regimes that can have a range of different outcomes. This is particularly visible in relation to gangs, which wax and wane according to urban morphology, thereby fundamentally challenging universalising assumptions about cities and violence. Yet gangs tend not to be recognised as intimately linked to particular urban political economies but are rather seen as naturalistic epiphenomena of cities, which are simply considered to be violent spatial locales. Moving away from such a vision of things is all the more important in view of the fact that cities have become key sites for contemporary innovations in "security governance" by both public and private agencies, with the UPP in Rio de Janeiro a paradigmatic example.

Such initiatives have arguably fuelled a conflation of security and development, insofar as urban violence is implicitly associated with criminality spurred on by poverty, and security governance emerges as a solution. Certainly, debates concerning the association of violence with development within the context of initiatives such as UPP have focussed on the way that the former undermines possibilities for the latter, emphasising that security brings necessary certainty to private and public investment decisions, reduces the scope for further criminal activity, and reasserts the authority of the state. From this perspective, security interventions are seen as developmental because they transform cities from spaces of violence (associated with underdevelopment) to spaces of peace (necessary for development). This approach overlooks two major factors. The first – well highlighted by Robert Bates (2001) in his book *Prosperity and Violence*, significantly subtitled *The Political Economy of Development* – is that development is an inherently conflictual process, to the extent that historically, development has frequently been extremely violent. The second is that cities are complex spaces that contribute and mould particular formations of violent actors and forms of violence.

Certainly, there has been too little critical attention to how the state engages with violence in cities; as the analysis of UPP in Rio de Janeiro starkly illustrates, 'development' is not a natural consequence of the state removing the 'bad guys'. At the same time, however, it is striking how the motivations underlying the implementation of such policies frequently have more to do with securing urban space for capital than ensuring public safety for all, to the extent that they can be quite perniciously perverse. In general terms such policies are more often than not based on processes of segregation, extreme violence, and the disregard of certain populations (read: the poor). To this extent, when seen from the street-level perspective of many developing world cities, the notion of urban spaces being "insecure" often has less to do with any putatively natural urban violence, and more because of the policies that aim to "secure the city". As such, far from

being inherently violent, cities emerge starkly as sites of social antagonism, and urban violence as an indicator of the existence of profoundly unequal processes of under- and unfair development.

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[1] A table summarising causative and correlated factors that explain violence simply categorises "rapid urbanisation" as an "Economic and Internal Stress", along with severe corruption, youth unemployment, natural resource wealth, and the low opportunity costs of rebellion (World Bank, 2011: 7).

[2] In earlier work Collier did note that urbanisation is associated with fewer deaths by armed conflict, although his analysis is limited to organised civil war (Collier & Hoeffler, 2004).

[3] Robert Bates (2001: 50) makes the far more nuanced point that violence signals a contested political settlement, while peace or circumscribed violence means that conflict is being

successfully managed or at least partially channelled. Bates, however, considers conflict to be organised 'within society' rather than as some aberration of social and political practice.

[4] When the focus does move to the city and violence, the World Bank (2010) adopts a much broader conceptualisation of violence, including criminal and domestic violence, and puts less emphasis on state-threat and conflict.

[5] They do find that conflict in cities is a result of weak political institutions, economic shocks and - with faint tautology - civil conflicts. The findings are based on a more nuanced appreciation of 'political violence' measured as riots, disturbances and lethal conflicts, although they ignore what is for most people the main 'problem' with violence, that is to say, robbery, mugging and homicide.

[6] The Bank seems to like the UPP because it is partially financed by the private sector including leading entrepreneurs such as Eike Batista (Muggah and Souza Mulli, 2012). In fact, the UPP depends on the federal government's $250 billion Programme for Accelerated Growth (PAC) for its budget.

[7] In fact the homicide rate had been falling before UPP was introduced possibly due to a truce between the major commando factions as control of the drug economy stabilised after a period of turf competition and/or an agreement between security forces, politicians and commando in the run-up to selection of Rio for the FIFA World Cup and Olympics.

[8] The PR campaign has presented the police as strategic, uncorrupt and sensitive to community needs. An iconic figure in the campaign has been Major Pricilla Azevedo, commander of the UPP in the first pacified favela (Dona Marta) and later in charge of Rocinha.

[9] There is widespread belief that pacification has focused on favelas controlled by commandos but ignored those controlled by milicia or even prepared some favela for milicia takeover. Similarly, there have been reports that pacification has simply displaced commandos rather than eliminated them, and that violence has been moved to other favelas. See http://www.abril.com.br/noticias/brasil/milicias-ja-dominam-41-5-favelas-cariocas-aponta-estudo-511295.shtml.

[10] During a visit to Providencia in 2009, before UPP had occurred, one of us – Jones – met with a municipal official and an engineer busy setting out the potential route of the cable car.

[11] The PAC has *subsequently* funded the construction of a health centre, education facilities and housing in Alemão.

[12] For example, in figure 1.1 on page 53 of the WDR, a graphic comparison is made between the media coverage concerning gangs, terrorism, civil war, and trafficking, highlighting that this has followed very similar trends for all of them, particularly since 9/11. Similarly, at a national level, figure 3 on page 113 discusses insecurity in Colombia in a manner that merges the violence of urban crime, gangs, FARC and ELN rebel groups, implicitly suggesting they are equivalent forms of violence (conspicuously, paramilitary violence is not discussed).

[13] Having said this, where gangs can sometimes be compared to rebel groups is in terms of their potential position within a broader structural context. As has been described in relation to Central

America and South Africa, gangs in both contexts, while not explicitly revolutionary in nature, can be analysed as emergent vanguard social forms, perhaps not revolutionary for themselves, but certainly in themselves, even if their rage is generally little more than a spontaneous and anarchic cry against situations of inequality, exclusion, and injustice (Jensen and Rodgers, 2008; Rodgers, 2009).