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DEVELOPMENT STUDIES – PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

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The Dialectics of Urban Form and Violence*

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Abstract Over a 50-year span, Institute of Development Studies (IDS) research has not focused on cities or urbanisation to the extent it might have. We find that there is good reason for cities to now be described as the 'new frontier' for international development. In particular, violence is increasingly a defining characteristic of urban living in both conflict and non-conflict settings. This has important consequences for the relatively under-researched links between urban violence, the processes of state building, and wider development goals. Benefiting from key IDS contributions to the debates on the security–development nexus, citizenship and the hybrid nature of the governance landscape, we argue that the moment is opportune for the Institute to deepen its research and policy expertise on urban violence 'in the vernacular'.

1 Introduction

There is good reason for cities to be described as the 'new frontier' for international development (DFID 2010). More than half of the world's people live in urban areas, and 50 per cent of these people currently live in cities with a population of 500,000 or more. Nearly all of the urban growth expected in the coming two decades is projected to occur in the developing world, with the urban population in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, two of the world's poorest regions, expected to double. The share of the poor living in urban areas is rising, and in a number of countries, it is rising more rapidly than the population as a whole. The urban share of poverty in eastern Asia is nearly 50 per cent, while a quarter of those living in poverty in sub-Saharan Africa are found in urban locations. This implies that one in seven people worldwide live in poverty in urban areas.

We find that over a 50-year span, Institute of Development Studies (IDS) research has not focused on cities or urbanisation to the extent it might have. The influential 'urban bias thesis' offered by Michael Lipton in the 1970s correctly identified the lopsided nature of development policies and practices that favoured urban areas to the detriment of rural populations, and research patterns at IDS reflected

this. Though we find that the majority of work in this area has occurred outside of IDS, three themes central to the understanding of the urban condition today, namely the security–development nexus, citizenship and the hybrid nature of the governance landscape, have all benefited significantly from IDS research. As we move towards an increasingly urbanised world, the moment is opportune for IDS to build on these foundational contributions.

2 Urban bias revisited

Unlike most other fields in development, the key academic contributions on the links between urbanisation and poverty have not been made at IDS, but elsewhere. This may partly be explained by a historical view of cities as sources of prosperity. In the mid to late 1960s, around the time when IDS was established, the urban anthropologist Jane Jacobs had already established detailed observations on how city economies work at the micro level, and how particular ways of urban living and interacting were the building blocks of prosperity. Jacobs opined that ignoring these would likely produce socioeconomic 'dynamics of decline' (Jacobs 1961). We were thus presented with a view of the world wherein 'without cities we would all be poor' (Jacobs 1969). By then, Arthur Lewis had also highlighted the significant presence of underemployment in rural areas, while Hans Singer (who was one of the first Fellows of IDS) and Raoul Prebisch had argued there was a long-run tendency for the terms of trade to adversely affect primary goods. As former IDS Director Richard Jolly puts it, 'One reason [for a rural focus to IDS research in the 1970s] was that rural issues seemed to be of overwhelming importance, in terms of population and poverty. A second may have been that economically the urban issues were taken to be a bi-product of industrialisation, which was a core focus of economic analysis of growth at the time.'[1]

These points of view were famously consolidated into the immensely influential urban bias thesis. Put forth by Michael Lipton – in work produced at IDS – the thesis saw development policies as being systematically distorted in favour of the interests of urban areas, and poignantly, to the detriment of the majority living in rural areas (Lipton 1968, 1977). This was also once the topic of a lively debate between Dudley Seers, the first director of IDS, and Michael Lipton (see Seers and Lipton 1977). Several decades on, Lipton maintains that 'the reduction of anti-rural (specifically, anti-agricultural) price bias – a welcome side-effect of the generally undesirable State shrinkage forced on sub-Saharan Africa [where urban bias has been most severe] by fiscal crises plus outside pressures – has not, as intended and hoped by the World Bank, led to a reduction in urban bias overall. That is because, given the lack of change in the urban–rural power balance, reduced price bias has been offset by growing fiscal bias: specifically, falls in pro-rural and pro-agricultural public expenditure (agricultural research, farm output data gathering, extension, even rural law and order)'.[2]

The validity of this point of view cannot be refuted outright, particularly because it did reflect conditions across the developing world

at the time in very real terms. The current poverty statistics presented at the start of this article, however, do present cause to re-examine the urban bias thesis, even if only in the context of some countries. Two decades on from the seminal works on the urban bias thesis, a collection of papers, again with contributions from IDS, laid out four critiques of the urban bias thesis, namely, (1) it neglects political institutions: the bias is not evident through all political systems or the ideological orientations of the ruling elite; (2) it neglects the impact of technological change that over time could make the rural sector more powerful; (3) it neglects that ethnic and religious identities cut across urban and rural landscapes – and this may limit the agglomeration of power solely in cities; and (4) that most often boundaries between what is urban and what is rural are at best blurred (Varshney 1993).

3 Cities, violence and state building

Picking up on the political economy critiques of the urban bias, recent work views cities as not only nodes of governance in the global North and South, but also ones which play a 'critical role in the processes of state consolidation, transformation and erosion' (Beall, Goodfellow and Rodgers 2013: 1). Indeed, as Charles Tilly (2010) argued, the changing relationships between cities and states can help us understand the centrality of cities in such processes. Importantly to our argument in this article, violent change is also central to these processes, but not necessarily in a socially deconstructive sense. Indeed, as revealed by Dennis Rodgers' work in Nicaragua – in certain circumstances, violence can trigger innovation and even be socially constructive. The (overseen) constructive attribute of violence should be situated within the inherent nature of how cities thrive and grow. Historically, a safe and secure city is arguably a dying city, while violence has been a characteristic of urban change (Rodgers 2015).

This does, however, need to be reconciled with key trends in the incidence of destructive violence today. Recent research points to the increasingly urban geography of violence (Buhaug and Urdal 2013; Raleigh 2015), which moves us beyond thinking of urban violence only as a periodic segment of war which is otherwise a rural phenomenon. When the violence of war does spill into urban areas, it is invariably indicative of changing strength ratios between rebels and government (see, for example, Holtermann 2014). Twenty-three of the 31 most fragile and conflict-affected countries today are projected to be significantly urban in the near future (Gupte 2016). We also know that violence against civilians during civil wars now occurs predominantly in urban areas (Raleigh 2012).

Moreover, the forms of violence that are typically associated with war or armed conflict are not the only significant modalities of urban violence. The destructive impacts of criminal and everyday violence can be more acute than traditional war – the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) finds that 'by far the largest aspect of the global burden of armed violence is the deaths and injuries that occur in non-conflict or non-war settings' (Geneva Declaration Secretariat 2008: 67). Much of this violence is centred in cities (UNODC 2013).

This brings us right to the confluence of three thematic areas – the security–development nexus (see Allouche and Lind 2013; Justino 2011; Luckham 2015), citizenship (Gaventa 2002) and the hybrid nature of the governance landscape (Cornwall and Coelho 2006) – that have each benefited tremendously from a long history of IDS research, even if this work was not directly focused on cities or urbanisation. These areas developed in a context where the state was no longer regarded as the sole or uncontested provider of security on the one hand, and on the other, there was a growing crisis of legitimacy characterising the relationship between citizens and the institutions that had an impact on their lives.

From a cities perspective, two key advances in knowledge help contemporise these debates: first, in the literature on cities as units of government, they grew to be distinct from the nation state weakened in an ever-globalised world (see, for example, Schiller and Fouron 2003). As Friedman (2003: 8) argues:

> the focality of the state in identity formation is giving way to competing identities from indigenous, regional, and migratory populations. The latter has also entailed a decentralisation of resources within the state… and an increasing division of powers, between the state as the representative of the nation and the subgroups that tend to displace it.

Second, the state was increasingly described as only one of several actors centrally involved in the processes and actions that produce and mitigate violence (see, for example, Punch 2012), alongside local, non-state and other sovereign groups (Muggah 2014, 2015b). In parsing out the nature of state violence, the focus has therefore shifted away from a singular understanding of the role of the nation state, and moved towards processes of governance (Nugent 2004) and multiple sovereignties (Rodgers 2006) that come together to produce outcomes of security and insecurity. In turn, the diverse types of violent encounters so produced only bear a superficial connection with the structures of the nation state, but instead, play out in the everyday (even intimate) spaces in the city (Datta 2012).

The most complex of these relationships are invariably playing out in the cities of low- and middle-income countries (Muggah 2015a), where most of the urban population growth in the coming three decades is set to take place (United Nations 2014). It is in these contexts that everyday lived experiences of violence undermine the confidence of citizens in government systems directly, indirectly have a negative impact on livelihoods, and frequently reduces the quality and quantity of service provision (for example, across urban Maharashtra riot victimisation is positively associated with economic vulnerability and weak social interactions, as found by Gupte, Justino and Tranchant 2014). Though these impacts are varied and often characterised as hyper-local, they do collectively shape wider discussions on governance and state fragility at the national scale (Commins 2010).

4 The dialectics between urban form, violence and security in the vernacular

Violence, therefore, is increasingly a defining characteristic of urban living in both conflict and non-conflict settings. It is shaped by and shapes the physical and social landscapes of urban communities. For example, fear of violence prompts the physical separation of high-violence neighbourhoods from surrounding areas, and can force women, men and children to adapt their daily life to avoid areas prone to violence on their way to work, around their homes, or when they play. Beyond the psychological impacts of such circumstances (see, for instance, review in Miller 2009), adapting one's way of living in this manner usually also has a direct financial cost resulting out of the need to build barriers, take longer routes to work, or forego livelihood opportunities due to concern for safety (see, for example, review in World Bank 2010).

As violence is 'non-linear, productive, destructive and reproductive' (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois 2004: 1), it has multiple and overlapping forms, which range by virtue of their motivations (e.g. economic, political, criminal), their modalities (e.g. armed, physical, sexual, psychological), by the nature of the victims (e.g. gender-based, youth) as well as the nature of the perpetrators (e.g. gang, mob). The relative importance of these characteristics is context-specific, with sociocultural norms and prevailing notions of what it means to live well in a city, playing as important a role as physical locations (e.g. mega-city versus small towns; inner-city versus periphery).

The ways these forms of urban violence interact have important consequences on the one hand, on people's lived experiences of poverty and vulnerability, and on the other, on the processes of state building in both conflict and non-conflict settings. Some views have romanticised the relation between political systems and (absence) presence of violence. These top-down approaches to studying violence explained safety in terms of state provisions, i.e. legislations, regulations and services. However, reality speaks otherwise. There are both conceptual and empirical gaps between the state's discourse of security and that of the society. Observe for example the study by Pearce, McGee and Wheeler (2011), which studied everyday violence in Brazil, Jamaica, Mexico and Nigeria. The study found that the relationship between state-provision of security and violence was far from straightforward, and ironically, in the instances when state-security interacted with non-state actors in the name of security provision, violence increased. Having been conducted in countries with democratic political systems, the study also pointed at implications on the relation between democracy and violence. Democratic political systems are not, and should not, be viewed as guaranteed vanguards against violence in the vernacular. Quite to the contrary, societies legitimise parallel discourses of security and violence through informal channels.

This leads us to highlight the wealth of potential findings that could be elicited from the complexities of peoples' everyday realities when we adopt innovative approaches to studying urban violence. Capturing the nature of violence in everyday life requires a departure from traditional methodological tactics that focus on legal, formalised and

institutionalised channels. But above all, researching violence requires honed communication skills by the researcher who must negotiate the space between the participant's safety and confidentiality as well as the safety of the researcher (De Silva 2009; Justino, Leavy and Valli 2009). Life histories, story-telling and video are among some of the alternative methods which we can use (Abah, Okwori and Alubo 2009). Studying violence exposes us to the deep nature of vulnerability, especially when the researcher is dealing with children. How do children perceive of violence for example? Observe this quote from Moncrieffe's study, when a little boy invited himself to a conversation that was taking place between the researcher and another child:

> Miss, people always die in my community. We had a war between my community and another one and them [they] give mi [my] uncle ten shots in his head and mi next uncle say him can't teck *[sic]* it no more [my other uncle said he couldn't bear conditions anymore] and went to country and one youth go country and shot him. (A young man went to the country to execute him. In Jamaica, urban residents normally refer to the rural areas as 'country') (Moncrieffe 2009: 52).

From these points of view, then, violence prevention or security provision may also be seen as 'in the vernacular' (Luckham 2015: 20), that is, 'through the eyes of "end-users" of security arrangements, and how it is determined in the power laden and multi-levelled contexts of contemporary violent conflicts' (Luckham and Kirk 2013: 339). This 'end-user' approach to security, wherein security is a basic entitlement of those who are supposed to be protected, and contrasts with understandings of security as the creation and maintenance of authoritative social orders, is highly relevant to the lived experiences of violence in the city today. Observe how the 'everyday' constructs a fluid meaning of violence that reflects the immediate social and cultural environments in which people live. Take the example of David, from Mumbai, who is

> a handyman who has taken on a Christian name since he works for both Hindus and Muslims, and is presently a member of one of the large Mumbai gangs, asks why people are so frightened of bullets – 'after all, the [local] word for a bullet and a sweet candy is the same!' While showing me a bullet, he says he sometimes coats his *goli* (bullet) with jaggery to make it a proper *goli* (candy). 'I am then no different from the shopkeeper who sells candies; we both make a living from candies, no?' (as quoted in Gupte 2011: 190).

Our ongoing work focusing on Mumbai and Cairo, two of the developing world's great primate cities, looks at the dialectics between urban form, violence and security in the vernacular. We look at how the urban grid defines crowd behaviour in the public spaces – such as squares, bridges, alleyways, and residential and commercial zones – during moments of public violence and protests, as well as how those same spaces are products of historical, socioeconomic and political processes that operate over long periods of time. These spaces also

eventually vernacularise the provision of security. Take, for example, the beautification policies of Cairo during Khedive Isma'il's rule when the government embarked on a new urban plan that replaced narrow streets with wider ones and built many schools in the city centre (Mitchell 1988). The aim was to increase pockets of discipline and order through the building of schools. The strict systems of schools would enforce a certain public display in the city centre. Students were dressed in a uniform, they learned strict codes of conduct in schools, and this became part of the spatial fabric of the city centre. In other words, the behaviour of people in the city centre complemented the architectural façade of the city. In modern times, however, one of Khedive Isma'il's palaces became what we call today Tahrir Square – a space so popularly linked to the recent revolution that it eventually had grave consequences for state building in Egypt (Lababidi 2008; Sims 2010).

In Mumbai, a group of inner-city neighbourhoods experienced a particularly high intensity of violence during an intense phase of riots that gripped the city in 1992 and 1993, in which nearly 1,000 people were killed and more than 2,000 injured (Srikrishna 1998). Being some of the oldest, these neighbourhoods provide critical insights into how outcomes of violence and order in a contemporary mega-city are both interrelated, as well as path-dependent. Through the early twentieth century, despite the dilapidated living conditions in these neighbourhoods, they continued to attract wealthier and more established workers because of their proximity to the mills. In recent decades, however, the area has been transformed into a predominantly low-income area. Following the riots in the early 1990s, there was a steady exodus of business-owning Hindu families from the area, coupled with an inflow of poorer Muslim households who were being persecuted in other localities (as described in Masselos 2007: 176). An elevated viaduct was completed in 2002, allowing thoroughfare traffic an uninterrupted run, by-passing nearly all inner-city neighbourhoods. At the time of its construction, the flyover was heralded not only as an ingenious solution to Mumbai's traffic, but also as a symbol of urban ingenuity as it stood to be the longest viaduct in India. Much less attention was given to those neighbourhoods that fell under the shadow of the giant concrete structure, and even less to the recent history of violence that had so critically shaped the lives of those who now lived below it.

5 Looking ahead at the next 50 years
Nearly two thirds of the global population of 9.1 billion in 2050 is projected to be urban. This implies the number of people residing in cities and towns will double from 3.3 billion currently, to 6 billion in 2050 (United Nations 2014). Tokyo is the world's largest city today, with an agglomeration of 38 million inhabitants, Mumbai has just over 21 million, while Cairo is edging towards 19 million. But by 2030, the world is projected to have 41 mega-cities with more than 10 million inhabitants each. Even by the most conservative of outlooks, the drawing power of cities will continue to attract not only those migrants who come in pursuit of economic opportunities, but also the most vulnerable among us, for the same reasons. Today, most refugees

worldwide are located in urban areas,[3] and this trend is likely to consolidate further as vulnerable people flee violence and persecution to look for opportunities and services in cities in their time of crisis.

This makes understanding the dialectics between urban form, violence and security provision a critical pursuit for international development in the coming years. How will the cities that receive large influxes of vulnerable populations respond? What will be the impact on local markets and services? How will security be provided, and for whom? And conversely, dare we ask, in what situations does violence have the potential to trigger socially constructive innovations? These are some of the questions driving research on cities today. And yet, this conversation is not complete without an incrementally complex and locally rooted understanding of the lived experiences of poverty and vulnerabilities in cities (Satterthwaite 2014). This, in particular, is an area well suited for contributions from the IDS tradition of privileging bottom-up perspectives.

As we have argued, the dialectics between urban form (in all its physical, social and political avatars) and violence are key to understanding not only the everyday realities of urban life, but also the very processes that produce and sustain poverty in the world today. Returning to Dudley Seers (1979), if the purpose of development is to reduce poverty, inequality and unemployment, then we believe cities must feature prominently; not only as spaces in which each of these are in sharp evidence, but also as sociopolitical, economic entities that help us frame and understand the world in which we live.

Notes
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1 Richard Jolly, pers. comm., 15 January 2016.
2 Michael Lipton, pers. comm., 23 December 2015.
3 As per UNHCR's 'Policy on Refugee Protection and Solutions in Urban Areas', 58 per cent of refugees worldwide are currently located in cities and towns.

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