



UCL Institute of Advanced Studies & Development Planning Unit workshop

## Urban vulnerabilities: infrastructure, health, and stigma

Friday, 8 June 2018

UCL Development Planning Unit, Room 201, 34 Tavistock Square, London WC1H 9EZ

This interdisciplinary one-day workshop will explore the link between infrastructures, in particular those related to sanitation, and urban vulnerability and stigma. It will engage both early-career and established scholars from a range of fields – including Architecture and Planning, Urban Geography, Critical Legal Studies, and Political Science – in a critical dialogue and encourage alternative presentation formats, including artistic and literary interventions.

Because of their ability to connect and disconnect residents from the city (Rodgers and O'Neill 2012), infrastructures function as sites of contestation and negotiation over what is public or private and who is included or excluded. Infrastructures can thus create vulnerabilities on several levels: the absence of infrastructure-based public services can create health problems, as well as advancing social stigma, both of which can act as an additional threat by legitimising dispossession. At the same time, reliance on existing infrastructures can also be viewed as a potential vulnerability.

As infrastructures function as symbols of modernity (Larkin 2012), the stigma of lacking access to these urban networks acts as an additional vulnerability to the functional health risks. Dominant urban discourses have historically conflated filth or disease in marginalised areas with the moral defects of their inhabitants, legitimising the existing social order. In colonial contexts, matters of hygiene formed the basis for justifying urban segregation by means of a 'cordon sanitaire' (Nightingale 2012). In Victorian London, infrastructural projects promoting hygiene were seen as essential to moral reform of the city's residents (Otter 2004): linking health with moral improvement of 'depraved' slum dwellers, the 19th century 'city as diseased body' was to be 'cured through the regulation and containment of social bodies' (Roy 2004). Similarly, current-day discourses of blight and decay are used to legitimise interventions of urban renewal displacing residents, whether through slum eradication or urban renewal (Gray and Mooney 2011). As Wacquant (2008) notes, territorial stigmatisation indicates that certain areas of the city lie 'outside the common norm' and thus paves the way for exceptional treatment of those areas – including dispossession.

At the same time, vulnerability is not only caused by the absence of infrastructural services. In recent years, the vulnerabilities caused by our ever-increasing reliance on infrastructural

networks have been highlighted by infrastructural and cyber-warfare (Graham 2004). Pointing towards our deeply embedded intermeshing with socio-technical systems around us, Gandy (2005) has even referred to infrastructures as an 'exoskeleton' – extensions of our bodily selves without which our survival would be questionable. In a similar vein, Butler (2016) theorises the human body as ontologically characterised by 'dependency on infrastructure', including human and non-human support systems. As we are always more-than-ourselves and outside-of-ourselves, she argues, vulnerability is the corollary of this subjecthood based on interconnection and relationality.

Urban infrastructures are not only the issue of political protest, but are often a prerequisite for any form of politics, Butler argues. In linking the most intimate human spheres with the public realm, infrastructures open up questions of health both from the perspective of urban policy and planning and from that of bodily and mental integrity. In connecting these differing realms, infrastructures allow for an analytical intersection of scales – in line with recent work on 'urban geopolitics' (Graham 2004, Roy 2004, Yacobi 2012) as well as the sliding scales of violence in 'intimacy-geopolitics' (Pain and Staeheli 2014).

The importance of questions surrounding infrastructure-based vulnerability has recently come into sharp focus in the UK. Government deregulation and opposition to 'health and safety' measures have had an appreciable impact on lives and survival, as was seen in the Grenfell Tower fire and thousands of premature deaths from smog in London. Taking into account the contemporary nature and renewed urgency of understanding infrastructural stigma and vulnerability, the workshop will seek to address the following questions, among others:

- How do we understand particularly urban forms of vulnerability, and what role do infrastructures, (lack of) health provisions, and stigma play in them?
- If, following Douglas and Kristeva, we understand dirt as 'matter out of place', or a form of transgression, how should we understand the role of stigma attached to lack of hygiene in intra-urban bordering processes?
- How can we theorise the dual capacity of infrastructures to address vulnerabilities and create them?
- Who is deemed 'vulnerable' and what kind of interventions does such labelling entail (aid, surveillance, rehousing/displacement, humanitarian intervention, institutionalisation)? How can we attend to the violent potentials of urban sanitisation and health?
- If the city itself is viewed as a vulnerable organism, what type of intervention are through to heal it, make it 'healthy', or 'resilient'? And what might such medical language reveal or conceal?
- What kind of politics may emerge from embracing vulnerability (Butler 2016), and how do these sit with discourses of 'resilience' (MacKinnon and Driscoll Derickson 2012), or 'cruel' forms of optimism (Berlant 2011)?

## PROGRAMME

9:30 Coffee and introductions

10:00 Welcome: **Julio Davila**, Head of UCL Development Planning Unit

10:15 Panel I

**Jennie Gamlin**, Institute of Global Health, UCL

*Globalisation and the political economy of gender: social structures and infrastructures of violence*

**Andrea Rigon**, Development Planning Unit, UCL

*Displacement through pro-poor infrastructure: a class analysis of infrastructure upgrading impact on residents of a Nairobi's informal settlement*

**Manal Massalha**, Independent Researcher

*"Rats the size of cats": failing infrastructure and the selective enforcement of law and order in East Jerusalem - the case of Kafr Aqab and Shufat Refugee Camp*

Discussant: **Haim Yacobi**, Development Planning Unit, UCL

12:15 Lunch

13:30 Panel II

**Adriana Allen**, Development Planning Unit, UCL

*Everyday infrastructural planning' in the urban global south: trajectories, politics and outcomes*

**Rebekah Plueckhahn**, Anthropology, UCL

*Rethinking 'quality' through the prism of infrastructural uncertainties*

**Eric Verdeil**, Geography & Urban Studies, Sciences Po

*Derelicted infrastructures in Beirut: making contamination visible*

Discussant: **Charlotte Lemanski**, Geography, Cambridge University

15:00 Coffee Break

15:30 Panel III

**Catalina Pollak Williamson**, Development Planning Unit, UCL

*Whose convenience? (Reflections from WC1)*

**Carlos Moreno-Leguizamon**, Department of Psychology, Social Work & Counselling,  
University of Greenwich & **Marcela Tovar-Restrepo**, Graduate School of Architecture,  
Planning and Preservation, Columbia University

*Vulnerable territorialities around health infrastructures: the case of urban intersecting  
identities in the South East of England*

Discussant: **Tatiana Thieme**, Geography, UCL

17:00 Concluding remarks: **Hanna Baumann**, UCL Institute for Global Prosperity and  
**Tamar Garb**, Director of UCL Institute for Advanced Studies

17:30 Drinks reception & screening of *Submarine* by Mouina Akl (2016, 20 mins)

18:30 Dinner for participants

## ABSTRACTS

Adriana Allen, DPU, UCL

### **'Everyday infrastructural planning' in the urban global south: trajectories, politics and outcomes**

For many urban dwellers, infrastructural uncertainty refers to 'predictable shocks' (such as increasing water tariffs or lower pressure during certain days of the week) rather than constituting a quotidian experience. The picture is significantly different when it comes to considering the meaning and experience of water uncertainty by the urban and peri-urban poor in the global south. In such context, the sources of uncertainty underpinning infrastructural services are endless: uncertainty about cost, about being evicted, about ever becoming connected (or networked).

In this presentation I argue that across the urban global south, the future is not one of networked systems but rather one of – paraphrasing Karen Bakker – 'infrastructural archipelagos', shaped by mis-recognised practices of everyday planning. Such practices should not be romanticised, but thoroughly understood in order to bridge the growing gap between everyday and large infrastructural planning. Drawing on a number of case studies, I explore the way in which quotidian planning operates and environmental injustices are lived, produced and reproduced.

Jennie Gamlin, Institute for Global Health, UCL

### **Globalisation and the political economy of gender: social structures and infrastructures of violence.**

The political economy of neoliberalism has overseen a progressive shedding of state responsibility for individual and collective wellbeing. As the provision of social infrastructures, that had come to signify and ensure varying degrees of security and continuity to modern communities, is systematically undermined, new and vulnerable gender dynamics emerge.

With specific reference to urban spaces in Latin America, this paper will examine how as older forms of patriarchy are defeated by the new, changing and shifting gender dynamics within and between households and labour markets make both men and women increasingly vulnerable to diverse fields of violence. These are violences that are generated by frictions brought through neoliberalism to a previously stable gender order. The impact of consumerism in the north on household divisions of labour throughout the global south, international legislations on trade liberalisation undermining agricultural production as a

stalwart of masculine identity, and the multiple ways in which migration shatters and re-configures family dynamics, are just some of the pathways to violence.

This current political economy of gender is characterised by an unchallenged form of patriarchal violence that has been legitimated through globalisation, and which, as the Argentine anthropologist Rita Segato argues, leans on the idea of individual freedom within neoliberalism to eradicate transgressions against this global ideology.

Manal Massalha, independent researcher

**“Rats the size of cats”: the politics of walls and rubbish in East Jerusalem – the case of Kafr Aqab and Shufat Refugee Camp**

Frantz Fanon describes the colonial city as a space of Manichaeic duality which is racialised, compartmentalised and separated by military frontiers. Its binaries are manifested in the city's spatial planning and socio-economics, infrastructure and architecture, streets and garbage cans. Drawing on Fanon's graphic description which very much reminds us of Jerusalem with its East and West divide, the presentation seeks to highlight the case of Kafr Aqab and Shufat Refugee Camp, two Palestinian neighbourhoods which since 2004 have been spatially dismembered from the city of Jerusalem by an eight-metre high concrete wall and terminal-like fortified military checkpoints. The presentation will showcase photographs of the failing infrastructure of the two neighbourhoods along with residents' account of such conditions and their take on the rubbish piles that dot their streets and much of the vacant spaces around.

Rebekah Plueckhahn, Anthropology, UCL

**Rethinking 'quality' through the prism of infrastructural uncertainties**

The dual nature of infrastructures to both alleviate vulnerabilities and create them creates uncertain physical and conceptual urban terrains that give rise to conflicting ethics and modes of speculation. This paper focuses on types of speculative imaginaries emerging out of this dual nature, that propel diverse types of rumour, conjecture, surveillance and conflict. Following peoples attempts to access and own apartments in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, this paper explores the conflicting paradigms that emerge as residents attempt to find 'life quality' through better 'infrastructural quality'. Infrastructural access or lack thereof – running water, sanitation, central heating – form one of the main determinants of class in Ulaanbaatar. However, given the recent surge in housing developments and an overreliance on aging socialist-era infrastructural systems, accessing apartment housing does not at all guarantee good infrastructural access. Instead, other burdens emerge including indebtedness through bribery or being mired in air pollution in attempts to access such

infrastructure. Attempts to secure property thus become a much larger ethical project to secure a better space within a deeply uncertain and changing urban landscape that is quickly giving rise to a larger urban ethical politics. This paper will attempt to theorise on the capacity for infrastructure to be both an alleviation and a burden through looking at the changeable and uncertain nature of infrastructure itself. It will explore how this uncertainty acts as a fluid but persistent counterpoint to the way we can (re-)conceptualise and conflate material and life quality.

Catalina Pollak Williamson, DPU, UCL

### **Whose convenience? (Reflections from WC1)**

Drawing on the particular history of the public convenience and its politicised trajectory from the Victorian age to the present, this paper presents a series of initiatives put forward between 2013 and 2016 to reclaim for public use a derelict toilet in the centre of London (postcode: WC1). The initiatives range from an interactive public artwork, intervening the site to bring awareness of its closure, to a campaign for its listing as an Asset of Community Value, in alliance with the local Residents' Association.

How do we read the history of sanitation today? What is the value of sanitation in contemporary public space, and should it be regarded as a public right? What is at stake in the bio-politics of hygiene? While reflecting on these questions, which are encapsulated by the events in WC1, this paper traces the complexities of engaging – as an artist-turned activist – with a highly contested site. These reflections will shed light on aspects of value, by examining the politics that are in play when the value of the (now ruined) convenience as a public asset becomes secondary to the investment value of the site.

'Whose convenience?' uses the case study of WC1 to explore the relationship between public space and sanitation, and more particularly, the implications that the loss of public conveniences might have for our conception of public rights, how we understand public ownership, and how these interests relate to private convenience.

Andrea Rigon, DPU, UCL

### **Displacement through pro-poor infrastructure: a class analysis of infrastructure upgrading impact on residents of a Nairobi's informal settlement**

This paper analyses an upgrading programme which used infrastructure as an entry point in an informal settlement where most residents are tenants. Physical infrastructure was perceived by all actors as a public good benefiting everyone and responding to needs of

residents, donors, and government. However, new infrastructures created a dynamic of changing property value and rent prices, and thus having a different impact on residents according to their class (tenant or owners).

Infrastructures bring substantial change but are less controversial than a full upgrading which may challenge existing power relations and contested ownership claims, thus raising conflict between some residents and government. In the case study, the major infrastructure was the construction of tarmac roads within the settlement. These allowed public transport to reach various parts of the settlement, increasing the value of nearby properties and rents and benefiting a part of the residents. But they also allowed the physical access of the state to the settlement and its surveillance. Thus, infrastructures justify and make possible the penetration and expansion of state power in areas previously considered "dangerous". A footbridge on a local river has reduced a type of vulnerability of particular groups who previously risked in the crossing but has paradoxically increased other types of vulnerability, particularly in terms of housing.

Finally, the management of infrastructure interventions also allowed the state to create community governance structures, de facto transforming a heterogeneous group of residents into a community to be governed.

Carlos Moreno-Leguizamon, Faculty of Health and Education, University of Greenwich, UK and Marcela Tovar-Restrepo, Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation, Columbia University, USA

### **Vulnerable territorialities around health infrastructures: the case of urban intersecting identities in the South East of England**

"The other does not exist: this is rational faith, the incurable belief of human reason. Identity = reality, as if, in the end, everything must necessarily and absolutely be one and the same. But the other refuses to disappear; it subsists, it persists; it is the hard bone on which reason breaks its teeth. Abel Martin, with a poetic faith as human as rational faith, believed in the other, in "the essential heterogeneity of being," in what might be called the incurable otherness from which oneness must always suffer."

-Antonio Machado

In the striking poem above, the poet Antonio Machado encapsulated long time ago the fluidity and liminality of identity, a burning issue of our time. Our essential heterogeneity of being or, better, the incurable otherness from which our oneness must always suffer, is the perfect beginning of the proposed presentation. It will focus on addressing how health-



based infrastructures in the South East of England become a catalyst of agentic processes to new forms of subjectivities and intersecting identities, particularly among so-called “minorities” or, as the legal framework in England defines them, Black and Minority Ethnic groups (BME). Who am I and who are we, are questions that not only implicate me or “my group” but also the context in which I exist, or “my group” exists, be it home, city or society. So, identity or, better, identities as in the case of BME people in the South East of England, is nonetheless crosscut by history and politics. And nowhere else are the history and politics of identity so much at play than in accessing/providing health services by the National Health Service (NHS), England. Thus, based on three qualitative research projects conducted since 2009 to date oriented respectively to i) identifying general health needs of BME groups in Swale; ii) identifying issues of chronic pain in BME people in Kent, and iii) exploring primary needs in terms of palliative and end of life care services among BME groups in Dartford, Gravesend, Rochester, Chatham, Gillingham and Swale, this presentation seeks to discuss how the health-based infrastructures and intersecting identities are spatially affiliated and territorialized in the South East of England. It also explores the role played by BME actors’ identities when accessing NHS health services. Finally, the presentation draws on Cornelius Castoriadis’ notions of subjectivity, agency and autonomy thus revealing new understandings of identity, vulnerability, and resistance.

Eric Verdeil, Geography & Urban Studies, Sciences Po

### **Derelicted infrastructures in Beirut: making contamination visible**

Using videos released by activists and film directors Cynthia Choucair and Mounia Akl, this paper questions the growing number of artistic endeavours that try to make sense of the infrastructural crises (power cuts and garbage collection and storage) the inhabitants of Beirut are going through by making the toxicity and the contamination resulting from the new metabolic flows associated with the so-called solutions to the crises.