

Parallel session 3B-1.4

Insecurities and violence

Tuesday 12 November, 16.00 – 17.30

South Wing Council Room (G12)

Chair: **Dr Katherine Saunders-Hastings**, Lecturer in Latin American Studies, UCL

‘The art of not knowing and of not being known.’ Urban violence, cumulative ignorance(s) and the right to opacity in the city of Cape Town

Dr Enora Robin, Research Associate, Urban Institute, The University of Sheffield

Despite numerous studies demonstrating that xenophobic violence is a widespread phenomenon, the recognition of its occurrence is absent in policies and information base about urban violence in South African cities. In this paper, we bring to the fore recent advances in studies of ignorance as a key aspect of racial politics to explore the process by which black African migrants and the xenophobic violence they are exposed to is made invisible. We argue that whilst studies of ignorance prove insightful to understand how specific lives are made invisible, they suffer two main shortfalls. First, they lack a geographical account of the processes through which ignorance is produced. Second, they often fail in integrating the agency of those who are made invisible, focusing exclusively on the structures of oppressive power. This article addresses both gaps through the study of violence against African migrants in Cape Town. We demonstrate how ignorance about this phenomenon is assembled through a cumulative (and uncoordinated) process of non-knowledge production intervening at different geographical scales (from the national to the infra-urban) – what we refer to as cumulative ignorance(s). We then bring into the analysis Edouard Glissant’s concept of opacity to advance existing conceptualisation of ignorance – which has focused on the notions of absence or lack – to show that the proliferation of relations and beings in space also leads to the production of ignorance when being invisible constitutes a survival strategy for those who wish to remain unknown, despite (and because of) the violence they suffer. These findings have implications for research on knowledge politics as they unsettle the idea that making people visible is always necessary to advance the recognition of the marginalised. Instead, we call for a greater sensitivity to self-determination and the politics of opacity/visibility in the design of responsible knowledge practices.

From Kingston to Brussels: exploring the sensory regimes of urban violence

Dr Alana Osbourne, Researcher, Royal Netherlands Institute for Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies

In this paper, I explore the sensory regimes of urban violence – or the interactions between sound, sight, smell etc. – that characterise violence and urban life. Urban experiences are

first and foremost embodied affairs, as emphasised by the emergent literature on ‘sensory urbanisms’. We apprehend the city and processes of urbanisation through affective and corporeal engagements with space. It is also through the body that we grapple with various forms of urban violence. Yet the sensory dimensions of urban violence remain undertheorised within urban studies. I suggest that a focus on sensory regimes, and in particular the dis-junctures and disruptions that typify them, can help us analyse urban conflicts across geographical contexts. To this end, I use ethnographic data collected in two locations – namely Brussels and Kingston – and tease out how urban violence is felt by city-dwellers in vastly different cities. In Brussels, I track how the city’s soundscapes, olfactory stimuli and sights shifted after the 2016 attacks in which part of the international airport terminal and an underground train carriage were destroyed, killing thirty people. Over a period of three years, I trace how the city’s sensory regimes shifted, from a moment of exceptional violence to a new sense of normalcy. In Kingston Jamaica, focusing on a high-crime neighbourhood, I recount how residents use changes in temperature, sounds and temporalities to describe and gauge the severity of the gang-related conflicts that animate their community. By juxtaposing sensorial descriptions from Brussels and Kingston, I demonstrate how a focus on the embodied dimensions of city life helps us understand and fruitfully study urban violence.

Linking urban violence and climate change: an agenda from institutional political ecology

Dr Arabella Fraser, Research Fellow, School of Geography, University of Nottingham

This paper aims to frame an unfolding agenda for urban research and policy at the intersection of violence and climate change, in particular offering a framing derived from the activities of a newly commenced GCRF Global Engagement Network working at this interface. It advocates for such an agenda to recognise the imminent urgency of stronger grounded enquiry into the myriad inter-linkages between non-conflict violence and climate change, but also deepens critical discussion into the relationship between contemporary urbanisation, violence and environmental risk.

Non-conflict violence and climate change risks are both increasingly urbanised, and both are growing challenges for urban development and planning, particularly in cities of the global south. Despite heightened concern in the respective fields of urban public security and urban environmental change about the human development challenge of these respective risks, the relationship between the two, in both its empirical and conceptual dimensions, remains under-explored. The paper draws on both a critical reading of the urban violence and urban disasters and climate change literatures, and a review of pertinent research case studies and programmatic examples, including contributions from GCRF Network partners. In particular, whilst deploying the potential of livelihoods and political ecology thinking to illuminate this inter-relationship, and its urban and spatial dimensions, the paper argues for stronger attention to critical institutional theory in an urban context, as allowing us to recognise and question the political and structural drivers of inter-linked risks, and the relationship between poverty, vulnerability and exclusion in the city. In this context, the paper then examines the potential for ‘integrated’ planning and practice solutions alongside the need to re-frame the relationship between urban adaptation, security and development.

The Causes and Effects of Energy Injustices in Dhaka's Slums

Mark L.G. Jones, PhD candidate, The Bartlett Development Planning Unit, UCL

Dhaka's slums represent a confluence of issues around poverty, rapid urbanisation, the urban experience and social justice, all operating within an environment of serious climate change vulnerability. Energy provision sits at the core of each of these meta-issues.

This paper seeks to contribute to an emerging field – energy justice – by opening up a dialogue with the capability approach. It investigates causes of energy injustices through a capability analysis of the effects of energy practices on residents in Dhaka's slums. The threat of eviction, absence of land tenure, illegal electricity connections and solid fuel cooking practices all contribute to a rich setting for analysis of causes and effects of energy injustices. Delivering energy to slum-dwellers is a key component in global poverty alleviation. According to Amartya Sen (1985, 1999), Martha Nussbaum (2000) and many others since, the important measure of outcomes in development programmes is not merely an economic metric, but rather an assessment of improved human capabilities. A capability approach proposes that energy practices lead to enhanced human wellbeing and freedoms.

The case study settlement, Kallyanpur Pora Bostee, is an illegal squatter settlement in Dhaka. I have recently completed my main fieldwork in the subject slum, an exercise which exposed a complex network of socio-economic vulnerabilities for the urban poor and substantial urban governance challenges. I am currently analysing this data to identify causes and effects of a range of energy injustices. Following a critical realist approach, causal analysis is undertaken at three nested levels being (a) the socio-political landscape, (b) the energy system and (c) local energy practices within the Bostee.