

Parallel session D1

Insecurities and urban violence

Monday 11 November, 14.00 – 15.30

IAS Room 11

Chair: **Dr Susan Moore**, Associate Professor of Urban Development and Planning, The Bartlett School of Planning, UCL

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

Governing urban life through violence and exclusion: lessons from Nigeria and South Africa

Dr Laurent Fourchard, Director of Research, Fondation Nationale de Sciences Politiques

The metropolises of South Africa and Nigeria are reputed to be dangerous, teeming with slums and high levels of insecurity, but we know little about how people in poor neighbourhoods are policed on a daily routine. In Lagos, Ibadan, Johannesburg or Cape Town, self-organised groups – often referred to in the literature as vigilantes – have been performing routine policing and street justice since the colonial period. In combining historical and ethnographic methods, the paper explores the ways in which daily urban life is governed through violence and exclusion, and questions the possibility of comparison between cities sometimes perceived as incommensurable. Three scales of analysis are considered. From the police perspective, urban vigilantism cannot be considered as just another form of neoliberal government as suggested by part of the literature, nor can it be reduced to the supposed privatisation, failure or decline of the state. Instead, colonial and postcolonial governments delegate or discharge to non-state organisations the power to police low-income neighbourhoods, opening avenues for an often-indiscriminate use of violence. Second, the urban environment is at the core of the analysis, in contrast to much anthropological research that has considered it secondary or insignificant. This scale will allow us to see the changes and continuities in two different neighbourhoods in Cape Town and Ibadan. Uneven types of violence and the presence of drug dealers and radically different urban forms inherited from the colonial and the apartheid period are permanently reshaping the ways in which these organisations police their area. Finally, a biographical approach focussing on two women involved in providing security in the Cape Flats (Cape Town) will help break down the vision of vigilante groups as homogeneous. Looking at individual trajectories reveals the vulnerability of women, and, more unexpectedly, how the experience of violence and insecurity can become a resource in a context of massive unemployment. Mixing different types of methods, and opening up a dialogue between comparative urban studies and anthropology and the history of vigilantism, might help to rethink urban violence and policing beyond common theoretical frameworks.

More-than-human geographies of policing

Prof. Rivke Jaffe, Professor of Urban Geography, University of Amsterdam

In cities across the world, urban spaces and populations are policed by a broad range of interconnected agents: the police, the military, uniformed security guards, voluntary neighborhood watches, and also, in many cases, armed vigilantes or criminal gangs. Beyond these various public and private policing agents, the protection of people's lives and property also involves a wide array of non-human entities: from high walls and electronic gates, to guns and alarms systems. In addition, many fearful urban residents turn to spiritual entities, from God or Allah to ancestral spirits and patron saints, in search of security. Urban policing is assembled through the dynamic connections between these human and non-human elements. This presentation explores the politics of protection and endangerment beyond the human. How do non-human entities, from security dogs to digital technologies, mediate urban policing? How do they structure the relations between protectors, threatening and threatened urban subjects and spaces? Emphasising the political role of various technologies, material objects and spiritual entities, the presentation opens up a more-than-human perspective on the connections between urban policing and inequality. Drawing on ethnographic research, it discusses how the politics of protection play out in everyday life: whose protection is pursued through different sociomaterial configurations, whose vulnerability they neglect or aggravate, and whose power they legitimize. While highlighting the role of both state and non-state policing agents, the presentation argues that we also need to focus on how non-human entities mediate these political relations of protection and endangerment.