Preface

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The first decade of the 21st century has witnessed a dramatic increase in levels of ubiquitous violence and crime in cities across the world, 'banalized' or 'routinized' in the daily lives of urban populations[1]. In some contexts the politicization of crime has increased linkages between political and criminal violence[2], while on others there has been a blurring of boundaries between violence and conflict, with the urbanization of warfare associated with increased attacks on civilian populations[3]. The close linkages between violence, inequality and exclusion, with the unequal distribution of resources intersecting with poverty, means that there are important impacts not only associated with macroeconomic development, but also in terms of the erosion of the capital assets of low-income populations often related to growing fear and insecurity[4]. Both these factors mean that violence and insecurity are now a critical concern for researchers and policy makers.

In 2002, at a time when this was less recognized as a critical development constraint in cities in the Global South and often still identified as a problem of individual criminal pathology, I was commissioned by the German Bank for Reconstruction and Development (KfW) to undertake a desk appraisal of their upcoming supported project on 'Violence Prevention through Urban Upgrading' to be implemented in Khayelitsha, Cape Town[5]. With violence-related policy predominantly single sector-focused[6], the project presented exciting, innovative solutions relating to a 'triangle' of violence reduction components as well as introducing a spatial approach. These linked urban renewal strategies in the public sphere for better environmental arrangements to reduce opportunities for violence, criminal justice measures to discourage potential violators and public health and conflict resolution interventions to support to victims of violence in the private space.

01. Moser and McIlwaine 2006

02. Sanín and Jaramillo 2004

03. Beall at all 2013

Previous page: Several women and a girl march in protest in Bolivar Square, demanding answers and accountability from the government concerning the thousands who were forcibly disappeared during the civil conflict here. They are holding posters showing images of some of the disappeared. A man is also walking in front of them and feeding a pigeon. The building in the background is the Colombian Parliament. Source: iStock/jcarillet

In the appraisal I drew on results from participatory research in urban Colombia and Guatemala, that acknowledged the 'voices' of the poor as much as the 'wisdom' of professionals, to highlight the fact that local communities identified solutions connected with building trust and cohesion of social capital as far more important than those associated with health and education-related human capital or infrastructure-linked physical capital[7]. These included the promotion of family values, and dialogue between community members as well as the formation of local organizations. In communities with limited trust in the state's ability to solve the problem-because of the absence or ineffectiveness of police, army or judicial system-local self-help solutions were favoured to deal with rapists, criminal and drug addicts.

Twelve years later, it is gratifying to acknowledge not only that the Khayelitsha project has 'been executed and become known as one of the most successful anti-violence projects in the continent', but also that it has given added importance to local community-based solutions to violence. The Khayelitsha experience then is the inspiration behind this edited collection of case studies that brings together in one volume the documentation of examples of 'good practice' community violence-related strategies from cities across three continents. Yet the focus on community solutions is not surprising considering the backgrounds of its editors; Kosta Mathéy's experience in housing and urban upgrading, along with Silvia Matuk's involvement on community construction projects, means that they translated this knowledge of 'self-help' local bottom-up solutions from housing to violence, when they turned their attention to the pressing issue of urban insecurity.

For them, as for many researchers and practitioners across the globe, community governance is key, even if not the panacea, to fundamentally addressing the multi-dimensional, endemic, context specific and interrelated complexities of urban violence and crime both 'in the street and in the home'[8]. This book, therefore, represents a milestone in the 'systematization of local experiences' so often invisibilized or ignored by top-down state or international agency responses. Just as the findings from Colombia and Guatemala showed that local communities did not automatically seek to resolve problems associated with violence, with avoidance rather than confrontation common strategy- remaining silent, circumventing dangerous areas, changing mobility patterns and 'don't do out at night'- so too this collection provides examples of avoidance along with prevention and reduction strategies. While individual case studies can so easily be dismissed as non-representative 'apt illustration', at the same time, the fact that there are no blue print solutions to the global challenge of urban violence, gives importance to this growing body of evidence that recognizes the plurality of actors and the specificity of local contexts. Factors such as the almost universal distrust in state's capacity to control or prevent crime, structural problems with policing and judiciary systems and the rapid expansion in non-state forms of social governance, as well as all gives added weight to the significance of the diversity of local community solutions illustration in this collection.

04.
Moser and Mcilwaine 2006

05.
Moser 2002

06.
For a six-fold sector-based categorization of ideal types, see Moser 2004

07.
Moser and McIlwaine 2004

08.
This phrase, in Spanish 'La calle y la casa' comes from Rodríguez and Segovia. 2012

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